JUDGE
ALONZO CONANT
(1914–1962)

A Biography
Ellen Conant Krohn
Judge Alonzo Conant (1914—1962)
A Biography

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Alonzo Conant Jr.

who loved his family and his community
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I decided to write my father's biography in the summer of 2014. As my research began in earnest, I could not have imagined how much had already been written about him.

After combing through relentless reels of microfilm of Maine newspapers, I have been able to create an accurate chronicle of my father's professional life. For the most part, this book has been written from primary sources coupled with, and complemented by, family remembrances and resources.

During the course of research, I have had the great benefit of the following libraries: Bangor Public Library; Bates College Library; Donald L. Garbrecht Law Library; Law and Legislative Reference Library; Maine State Archives; Maine State Library; and the Raymond H. Folger Library, University of Maine. In addition, I owe thanks to the following people and organizations: Charles A. Lloyd, U.S. Naval Armed Guard WW II Veterans Association; National Personnel Records Center; the National Archives Trust Fund; Erin Lopater, Mariners’ Museum; and Maria R. Fuentes, Maine Better Transportation Association. Thanks to Google for making available the online copies of early newspapers from Lewiston, Maine. Finally, I owe an immense debt to my beloved family and friends for their invaluable advice, support, and encouragement. I am forever grateful to them. I thank my
sister, Sue Turner Conant, for the hours of recounting, reminiscing, replaying, and reviewing. We shared a wide range of emotions as we remembered our father’s loss, recalled our father’s love, and learned even more about our father’s unconditional love for his family, hometown, and home state. I thank my husband, William B. Krohn, for his most helpful comments throughout the writing process and for his reading and rereading of the many drafts of the manuscript text. His experience, editorial skills, and constant support have been central to the completion of this book.

It is my hope that my father’s worthwhile biography will bring as much joy to others as it has brought to me while I have had the great honor to write it.
PREFACE

At sixty-seven years of age, I began writing my father’s biography. I was fourteen when he died; he was forty-seven. Through these many years, I have excavated my emotions, mined my memories, searched old sights and sounds, dissected faded discussions, and relived sorrow and joy enumerable times; a potpourri of a young girl’s impressions of her father. My sorrow at his passing, since I was quite young, was unimaginable. The reality of his death was undefinable, frightening, and painful, and our lives were turned upside down. This towering physical presence—known for his gentle and encouraging words, his unequivocal, never-say-die attitude, his wonderfully warm wisdom, his understated understanding, and his fatherly love—was snatched away from us, never to be known again. That memory was and is always with me. Since I was never able to have an adult conversation with my father, for obvious reasons, I’ve always wondered—who was this man beyond being my father?

Technology, access to information, and my desire to place the pieces of the puzzle together have moved me to the write his story. Thanks to the many issues of the Lewiston/Auburn newspapers that are accessible on the Internet, the real-life journalists’ writings that are filled with great detail and accounting, personal peer letters of admiration, interviews located in the Muskie archives at Bates College, and the help of my family, I have been able to find much more information than I would have ever presumed so many years after his death. Such a lovely surprise. I have found information
regarding my father's life, including data describing his many accomplishments as a state legislator, the Director of Enforcement Division for the Maine Liquor Commission, a private lawyer, a legislative agent for the Maine Good Roads Association, a civic leader, a humanitarian, a naval officer, and a family man. I had never known that he was one of the last serving municipal court judges in the state of Maine. It was in 1961 that the municipal courts and the trial justices system was abolished and the new statewide district court was created. It suffices to say that my father achieved so very much in such a very short period of time.

The more I uncovered about the story of Alonzo Conant, the man, the more it became clear to me that I must write this book. His story is your story and my story, and yet it's unique. The single child of older parents from two contiguous countries, he was the pride of his parents and favorite son of his city and state. He was the only son of farmers who tilled the soil, fed and milked the cows, sheared the sheep, bedded the horses, and scrimped and saved so that Alonzo—whom they called Lonnie—could go to college and achieve great things.

The words of Thomas Day Jr., his clerk court recorder and friend, have sustained our family through these long years since his death. He wrote the following in a letter of condolence to my mother a few short days after my father's death: "In brief, among the fine men I know, he stands among the highest. I am sure the loss to his family is immeasurable, but I know too, that the memory of him and his example will be a bulwark and support and a consolation to you now, which is a legacy of so much greater strength and value than so many men leave, regardless of their age and wealth. You are blessed to have had him until your children are their present age."
CHAPTER 1

Family History and Early Life

In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future.
—Alex Haley

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.
—Mahatma Gandhi

The year 1914 saw the start of World War I, the opening of the Panama Canal, Congress setting up the Federal Trade Commission, the passing of the Clayton Antitrust Act, the installation of the world’s first red and green traffic lights in Cleveland, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson as president of the United States.

On October 8, far away from the world’s turmoil on the family farm in Turner, Maine, my father was born. The name he was given was the same as his father’s—Alonzo Conant. Baby Alonzo’s mother, Lottie Amelia Noble had, as a young woman of eighteen, emigrated from Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, to Lewiston, Maine. She and her sister had left their rural family home, where jobs were scarce, to work in a Lewiston shoe shop. Far from their Canadian farm, the sisters sat in row after row, side by side, hour after hour, day after day in dusty and cramped conditions. With like immigrants, the sisters stitched shoe soles to tops in a production line that produced what became known as piecework. Piecework was hard work.
As many Americans in that time, Lonnie was a child of a long line of farmers—farmers on his mother's side and farmers on his father's side. Many of his father's ancestors had emigrated from England for varied reasons. In 1623, Roger Conant, a relative and famous Pilgrim, arrived in Salem, Massachusetts from Devonshire, England aboard the Ann. The Ann, a 140-ton supply ship replete with settlers and other colonial support, carried passengers who were either joining husbands or future husbands who had sailed on the Mayflower three years earlier.

Generations later, in 1795, Benjamin Conant continued the migration of the Conant family, moving from Bridgewater, Massachusetts to Turner, Maine (at that time still part of Massachusetts). In Benjamin's day, the trip on horseback took three long weeks. Benjamin, a Revolutionary soldier, with his wife Elizabeth Hooper, cleared his farm, built a cabin, and planted crops on 250 acres. An article in the Lewiston Weekly Journal of December 21, 1899, entitled "The Conant Homestead" described the farm's acreage as "all good land and richly productive so full of picturesqueness with the hills and woods back and the tumbling turbulent river in front." That river was the Androscoggin River. The farm's "great house" was "big enough for a hotel, but not out of keeping with the farm and out-buildings and having a big, typical farm kitchen with a lovely sitting room."

Traveling from Auburn to Turner, one felt the curve of the road dip and pitch, then ribbon out to reveal the Newell, Goggin, and Babbit Dam. Just up over the hill from the dam, the great homestead fully filled the landscape. It was a beautiful sight. It was there that Alonzo Conant Sr. (son of Calvin Conant and Celia Staples, grandson of Benjamin Conant) was born on December 25, 1865, some seventy years after Benjamin's arrival in Turner. In 1914, my father Alonzo Conant Jr. was born in the very same farmhouse. Sadly, the house that had been built in 1858 and had survived a tornado was destroyed in 1915 by a
The Conant Homestead on the west bank of the Androscoggin River in Turner, Maine. This farm was located just north of the Auburn town line. The homestead burned to the ground in 1915 after being in the family for more than a century.

roaring fire that leapt from building to building, swallowing the farm forever.

It was an impressive homestead. Long hayfields and towering maples, which columned the drive, marked the farm. The “great house” with its whitewashed clapboards stood proudly overlooking the thirty-five head of cattle, five horses, and the flock of ewes, lambs, and rams. The scent of manure must have been unmistakable. Most years, the farm yielded more than one hundred tons of hay, several hundred bushels of potatoes, and hundreds of bushels of yellow corn, which was ground in local mills for the stock. At that time, no train service was available to haul grain from the distant station in Auburn, so the Conants grew it, milled it, and fed it to their own livestock. The farm was a fine example of diversified agriculture. For the family, it was subsistence farming with the production of fruits, vegetables, hay, and meats. For the
animals, the feed was homegrown. Commercially, the farm produced milk and sold it to surrounding communities. Economically speaking, the farm, for all of its splendor and beauty, was capable of supporting only one or two families.

Calvin Conant's offspring married and had children. Some died young from tuberculosis, some remained in Maine, and others moved to distant locations. The Lewiston Weekly Journal of December 21, 1899, described the Conant children as follows: "From this spot have gone out many bright sons and daughters who made glad the heart of nature by subduing the wilderness. One son of Calvin, George C. Conant, is in Idaho, a prominent grain dealer. Another son, Charles S. Conant, is editor of the Monte Vista, Rio Grande County, Colorado paper, and is succeeding in making it a very breezy and bright little paper." The Conant children's accomplishments were diverse and wide-ranging. The children were proud products of their heritage—fine examples of their hardworking farm family.

Today, when travelling one mile north of Auburn on Rt. 2, turn east on the Conant Road at the Twitchell Airport to discover the old farm site. Still just over a car width wide, the road winds past the Conant Cemetery, which is encircled by an iron fence cornered with massive cedar posts. The metal arched entryway displays the words "Conant Cemetery" in bold black letters. The cemetery is full with slate headstones of Conant men who, through the decades, fought in the French and Indian War (1754–1763), the American Revolution (1775–1783), the Civil War (1861–1865), and the Spanish American War (1898). It is peppered with tiny headstones of Conant children who died young. A modern pilgrim can still visit the cemetery and wander through tall hayfields in clear view of the Androscoggin River, but can only imagine the lovely Conant "great house" and barns of times long ago.

Alonzo Sr. was the youngest of thirteen children. No records were found regarding his education; however, it is probable that
he attended schools in Turner, Maine. The 1898–99 census data indicates that Alonzo Sr. was a farmer and that he delivered milk. The same census shows that he was co-owner of a grocery store that was located at 97 Ash Street in Lewiston, Maine. The grocery store bore the name A. Conant and Company. The co-owner of the grocery store was Mr. Barney Mayo. Mr. Mayo was also his father-in-law. Barney’s daughter and Alonzo’s first wife was Carrie Mayo. Carrie died in 1900 when she was only thirty-five years of age. Her death certificate states that the cause of her death was tuberculosis. The certificate also states that she had endured a two-year bout with the disease. In addition, the certificate indicates that she had no children. Upon additional research, it was discovered that Alonzo and Carrie had been married for only two years.

Five years later in 1905, Alonzo married his second wife Lottie Amelia Noble. He was forty, and she was twenty-five. The record of marriage shows Alonzo working as an agent for Merchant Express Company. The company was a stagecoach messenger service, located at 29 Ash Street, Lewiston, Maine; there was no mention of Lottie’s work. The exact when and where Lottie and Alonzo met has been lost to time. However, it is known that the shoe shop that Lottie worked in was located a short distance from Alonzo’s grocery store; perhaps they met at his store. What is known is that Alonzo was very handsome. Photographs and family descriptions paint a portrait of a man who had prominent bushy black eyebrows and a neatly trimmed full head of wavy brown hair. His eyes were almond-shaped and ice blue in color; his handlebar moustache masked his entire top lip. One family photo shows Alonzo’s head held high; his gaze was direct, yet there was a distinct softness in his eyes. He is shown in a properly appointed suit, distinct polka-dotted tie, and a finely starched cambric shirt. Lottie fondly described him as “a good man” whom she loved very much. Alonzo Jr. often spoke of his father’s kind nature. He spoke of how much it meant to him to have a warm, loving, safe, and happy home.
Alonzo Conant Sr. (1861–1938) spent his childhood and early years on the Conant Homestead in Turner, Maine. As an adult, he farmed, delivered milk, was a Merchant Express agent, and co-owned a grocery store in Lewiston, Maine. In 1905, Alonzo married Lottie Noble from Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.

As noted in the 1901 Canadian census, Lottie Amelia Noble was the first child of William Noble and Isabelle Moffitt. Lottie was born on the family farm in Rusagonis, New Brunswick, on March 26, 1881. The census goes on to state that William and Issabelle, Lottie’s parents, were born in New Brunswick, William in 1853 and Issabelle in 1861. They are identified as Scottish and their religion Baptist. The 1851 Canadian census shows that Adam Noble, William’s father, was born in Scotland on October 31, 1818. He died at the age of eighty-two on the family farm in Rusagonis. Adam and his son, William, farmed and lumbered the large parcels of family land. The lumber business remains to this day owned and run by family members.

Alonzo Jr. often visited the old farm. He and his mother would take the train to Rusagonis, a long and dirty trip. As Alonzo
sat looking out the train windows, the beautiful red, red clay of the land held his heart. The tall trees, lush pastures, and his deep and strong Canadian and Scottish heritage filled him with pride. He loved his grandparents dearly and they him. After all, he was the only son of their eldest child. Lottie had proven herself gutsy and strong when she left the old farm and went to another country to find work. In the early nineteen hundreds, women held a tentative place in society; however, Lottie was not one to be put in a box and was the exception to the rule.

Lonnie always looked forward to visiting the family farm. On one occasion, when Lonnie was just ten years old and longing to have a piece of the farm, he asked his grandparents if he might uproot a couple of tree saplings and take them home to Auburn to plant in honor of his Canadian roots. He was granted his request. The trees grew tall and strong at 650 Center Street, where they towered over and protected all who lived there. Eight years after Lonnie’s death, one was cut and stood proudly in the town square during the Christmas season of 1970.

Lottie, like Alonzo Sr., grew up in a large farmhouse on a lot of acreage. Whereas Alonzo was the youngest of thirteen children, Lottie was the eldest of seven. Visitors were always welcomed in the Noble farmhouse kitchen. The smell of apple pie filled the air, and instant salivation was a common response. The large black cast-iron cookstove was actually two stoves that accommodated both dry and moist baking. It was always alighted and wore a heavy pot of stew and a water-filled tin teapot of hot water. The warm oven baked biscuits, cookies, and cakes. A wooden drying hanger was attached to the wall and was heavy with wet linen towels. There were bins filled with sugar, flour, and grains, all waiting at the ready for the red and weathered hands to work their time-honored skills to magically prepare sustenance for the large Noble family. With all of the mouths to feed, the women would spend the greater part of their day preparing; they were inextricably bound together by
the work of their hands. On the summer porch, molasses cookies, pie, and tea were the order of the day. Years later, Alonzo acknowledged that those semisoft, spicy molasses cookies melted in his mouth and reminded him of the old farm and simpler times. The smell of baker’s yeast filled the air; great loaves of bread lined the counter. Lace handwork not only hung at the large windows, it lay upon the sideboard and sat under crystal bowls. It was pleasant and cozy. As late as the 1950s, many farms had no indoor plumbing. The Noble farm was no different.

Lottie was the family favorite. She was sweet, kind, happy, and loved by all who met her. Her nickname was “Joyful Té.” In a 2014 telephone interview, Isabelle Noble Baskin, a cousin of Alonzo, discussed Lottie’s independence and brave nature. The thought of travelling to another country all alone at age eighteen would have been unthinkable for most, but Lottie knew that to do so would be her hope of work and income. Staying in eastern Canada in the early nineteen hundreds was not a viable option for her, as there was little to no economic opportunity. Not only were French Canadians from Quebec flocking to the mills of Maine, so too were the English Canadians from the Maritime provinces. She struck out on her own, procured a job in the shoe factory in Lewiston, Maine, and then urged her younger sister of three years, Bessie, to do the same.

Bessie eventually moved to Portland where she worked in ladies clothing as a sales clerk. Bessie never married. She did, however, live with a gentleman named Ralph who was very kind to her. They remained a couple until his death and had no children. The author vividly remembers visiting their in-town apartment. The apartment building was one of the beautiful old brick buildings off Congress Street. The halls were dimly lit; the doors were labeled with hand-printed names framed by rectangular brass nameplates. Their one-room apartment was sparsely and neatly decorated. The Murphy bed, which was hand-carved and bronze oak in color,
posed a real and magical conundrum for a child of five. The sight of a vertical wooden structure being transformed into a horizontal bed was supernatural! Lottie and Bessie visited with each other several times a year, enjoying lobster lunches and ice cream, reminiscing about their childhood in New Brunswick, looking to the future, and just being sisters.

The year 1905 would witness the wedding nuptials of Lottie and Alonzo in Lewiston, Maine. The world, national, and local events and incidents would become the canvas upon which the Conants would paint their future portrait together. The world view offered the foreboding Russo-Japanese war raging and the beginning of the Russian Revolution. Nationally, the Industrial Workers of the World was founded in Chicago with the hopes of giving workers a stronger voice. On the rail transportation front, eighteen-hour train rides between New York and Chicago were instituted, and the first train equipped with electric lights was added to the fleet. Theodore Roosevelt was president; unemployment was at a low of 4.3 percent, Albert Einstein introduced the Theory of Relativity, and Agile—the beautiful thoroughbred stallion—was the Kentucky Derby champion. At home in Maine, the automobile tourists replaced the more sedentary Grand Hotel visitors, and the Good Roads program established a state highway commission. Who knew that fifty years later, Lonnie would be hired by the Maine Good Roads Association as their legislative agent and become acknowledged as an authority on highway matters?

In 1905, philanthropist Andrew Carnegie gave Auburn, Maine, $25,000 to construct a building to house its library. As a young man, Alonzo spent hour upon hour in this library, time-travelling through centuries of exciting history; with his natural curiosity and phenomenal memory, he consumed information. Time warped as he sat surrounded by a world of words. In 1960, Lonnie would be elected vice president of the very same establishment.
In his library studies, not surprisingly, he found himself drawn to the volumes of books written about the Civil War. As previously mentioned, his relatives served in America’s early wars. For example, Lonnie’s uncle, Winslow H. Conant, fought in the Civil War. At age nineteen, in the year 1861, he entered the war as a private in the 13th Maine Infantry, Company F. It was the same year that his baby brother, Alonzo, was born. Two years later, Winslow returned home ostensibly unscathed. He died in 1925 at the advanced age of eighty-three. He is buried in the Conant Cemetery in Turner, Maine. Winslow’s grave is marked with a large black slate headstone incised with his name; a shield encircles the infantry and company details.

On Monday, July 3, 1905, Alonzo Conant Sr. married Lottie Amelia Noble in Lewiston, Maine. It was the marriage of two people from different countries; she was twenty-five and he a widower of five years. They were both children of large farm families and familiar with the endless hours of laborious effort that farm work required. They would work together, hand in hand, side by side, farming and supplying the surrounding towns with “white gold,” the colloquial term for milk. The *Lewiston Weekly Journal* of December 21, 1899, described the milk production on the Conant farm: “Two hundred quarts of milk a day are wholesaled in Auburn.” The source was Holstein and Jersey cows. Research shows that Jersey cows produce milk that is rich, creamy, and sweet and has about six percent butter fat (thick cream). It is high in protein, vitamins, minerals, and fat. Comparatively, Holstein cows produced massive quantities of milk, but it was watery and much less nutritionally rich. Both breeds of the milk-producing ungulates suited the farm’s diversified business and income strategy. Proudly, the Conant farm produced and delivered this homegrown commodity for decades.

Alonzo and Lottie’s life on the farm was busy, yet not fulfilled. Nine years came and went, and then on Thursday, October 8, 1914, far from the world’s turmoil, young Lonnie was born.
What a day that was! The front downstairs bedroom on the old homestead welcomed another Conant farm baby and excitement filled the air.

Alonzo Conant Jr. when he was approximately one year old (left) and three years old (right). Lonnie, as he was called by family and friends, was the only child of Alonzo and Lottie Conant.

The family’s joy was short-lived, however, and the famous Conant farm came to a fiery end in 1915, just one year after little Lonnie’s birth. It was common practice for farm buildings to be connected. More succinctly put, the main house was connected to the shed and to the barns. The reasoning behind this blueprint was convenience; the winters were long and cold, and the cows needed to be fed, milked, and mucked-out. In addition, for drainage, farms were often built on high ground. On the fateful day of the Conant fire, the flames, with the high wind at their back, jumped rapidly from building to building until the whole complex was involved. Without a firehouse nearby, the family mounted an all-out effort to combat the inferno, but within a matter of hours all of the buildings
were reduced to ash. The raging fire had poked its perilous finger in the face of the men who tilled the soil. The farm was gone. All the buildings of the Conant Farm were reduced to sentimental cinders; the majesty of a once-thriving acreage lay in ruins.

And so, Alonzo, Lottie, and little Lonnie were forced to leave their beloved farm and home behind and move five miles south to Auburn. They would miss the pleasant family days of sweet-smelling, newly cut hay; the early morning milkings; the milk deliveries; the veeries’ evening call reverberating in the summer twilight; and “the field of sheep fed in the gathering dusk of

Alonzo Conant Sr. had this house built for his young family in Auburn on a five-acre lot after the 1915 farm fire. Originally located at 650 Center Street, the house was moved and renovated in 1970, and today the house is situated on two acres at 1270 Turner Street.
the late afternoon looking like a piece of one of Jean F. Millett’s canvases,” so described in the *Lewiston Weekly Journal* article of December 21, 1899. But 650 Center Street in Auburn would be their new homestead, and a new beginning.

A baby of twelve months, Lonnie knew nothing of the unintended consequences of that fateful fire. After all, he just was spending his time learning a toddler’s lessons. Auburn and the new home would wrap the family in the warm wonder of the future. A telephone interview with Isabelle Noble Baskin, Lonnie’s Canadian cousin, revealed a thing or two about little Lonnie. Isabelle recounted that, early on, Lottie and Alonzo recognized Lonnie’s exceptional intelligence. He was said to have a curious nature and was very independent yet sweet, kind, and easily reared. In a word, his parents were enamored with their little Lonnie. Isabelle added that as soon as he was able to read, he would consume books with delight, and was quick to learn. She said that his behavior reflected his parent’s attention to manners and politeness. “Yes, ma’am,” “Yes, sir,” and other words of respect easily rolled from young Lonnie’s lips. Lonnie truly loved being an only child. He said that he always felt the love that his parents had for him. As an adult, he would tell his children, “I could sit and read my books all day long and my mother let me eat a whole apple if I wanted to,” and “I loved my parents!”

Lonnie’s early Adolescence and primary education were filled with school, sports, and family. In 1929, as grade school ended, Lonnie entered the more complicated world of Edward Little High School. During the same era, the country fell into the vortex of the Great Depression. The spiraling effects of four to five million Americans out of work, banks collapsing, Wall Street crashing, and folks in dire straits meant that the Great Depression took its toll on everyone.

In Maine, the mill towns such as Auburn and Lewiston were the economic engines for the region, and they were hit hardest by
the Depression. In contrast, rural, self-sufficient farms, with their isolation from national markets, were able to endure the hard times more easily. Despite the ongoing Depression, Lonnie's secondary education moved forward smoothly. Fortunately for Lonnie, Auburn's Edward Little High School offered a full range of academic extracurricular offerings with well-trained and respected teachers. Edward Little High School had been named after a prominent citizen who was a businessman from Massachusetts. He was one of the town's incorporators who had given generously of his time, land, and money. Mr. Edward Little was also known as the "Squire Little."

As a student, Alonzo saw his high school annexed with a new auditorium, gymnasium, classrooms, and a main office; all were needed due to overcrowded conditions. Interestingly, Lonnie's faculty was comprised of seventeen single women, one married woman, and four men. In the Depression years of the 1930s, three-quarters of professional women were school teachers or nurses. A popular view of the day supposed that the proper role for a white, middle-class woman was to be a wife and mother. Curiously, the perception of the day was that a women could not be both college-educated and married. In effect, that kind of narrow thinking put an onus on single women. The fight for women's right to vote was hard fought, bloody, and deadly at the time. The vote for women finally came in 1933.

In Lonnie's home setting, his parents were, indeed, equal partners. In the days before the fire of 1915, his mother had run the household while his father labored in the barn and farmed the fields. Lonnie revered his parents' equal partnership. As an adult, he told his daughters Sue and Ellen that seeing his parents work together was like watching a beautiful team of Belgian workhorses, both leaning into those leather collars, side by side. How stride by stride, chests full, with mirrored breathing, they pulled that solid, stone boat as if it were an insignificant feather. That visualization
stayed with Sue and Ellen. Proudly, Lonnie taught his girls about the importance of equal rights for women. The girls, with their mother and father as models, became early feminists. This was one of many lessons that Lonnie learned as a youngster, and one of the many lessons that he would entrust to his children.

As Alonzo was socially adept, he easily attuned himself to the ebb and flow of high school rigors. In the halls of Edward Little High School, he was a familiar figure. His singular way of walking gave the impression that his agile, athletic build was well-oiled and strong. At six feet, two inches tall and 210 pounds, he towered over others! Full wavy brown hair framed a fresh face with clear, steel-blue eyes. He was known by his peers and teachers to be focused, energetic, and disciplined. It seems, too, that his contemporaries were somewhat captivated by his ready good humor, quick wit, and good nature; he was voted “Best Natured” in the senior superlative section of the 1932 Oracle yearbook. In that same yearbook, he was also tabbed a “jokester.” He was known for his one-liners. “What is an operetta?” Lonnie asked. “A girl who works for the telephone company!” was the punch-line. In subsequent years, Alonzo’s wife, Ruperta Turner Conant, would tell her daughters, “Lonnie always made me laugh, he had the kindest nature, and he was very handsome to boot. Just a few of the reasons I married him!” Lonnie was very involved and made multiple contributions, not only to his senior class but to his school as a whole. Of the 120 pages of his high school yearbook, Lonnie appears in ten photos and his name is in print fourteen times, demonstrating his social, athletic, and scholastic achievements.

The quotation under his name in the senior photo section of his yearbook reads: “Lonnie fits anywhere, whether in the football field or in the classroom.” The short verse was actually written by a fellow classmate and as it turns out, was not only complimentary, but very accurate. Lonnie was a member of the following organizations: Press Association, Oracle Staff, Station Staff, Literary
Society, Debating Society, Dramatic Club, Operetta, Baseball Manager, Glee Club, Football, Basketball, Track, Hi-Y, and the Lyford Prize Speaking Contest. He was sports editor for both the Oracle, the Edward Little High School yearbook, and the Station, which was the school newspaper. Lonnie proved to be an accurate and interesting writer. His journalistic endeavors coupled with his affinity for debating conveyed his early inclinations for compiling information, accessing information, and sharing information with the unique ability to make a solid case. Perhaps there were early precursors of what was to come. His prowess as a debater led his cohorts to deem him “The Conqueror” in debate. Lonnie was assigned class luminary status for football and journalism. All recognitions appended the growing portrait of a young man who was active in his academic community and possessed intellectual vitality, analytical abilities, and an arresting presence accompanied with spirit and commitment.

ALONZO CONANT, JR., “Lonnie”
Born October 8, 1914, Turner
Course, College

“Lonnie” fits anywhere, whether on the football field or in the classroom. He rose to great heights on the stage.

Press Association 2, 3, 4; Oracle Staff 4; Station Staff 2, 3, 4; Literary Society 3; Debating Society 2, 4; Dramatic Club 4; Operetta 4; Glee Club 3, 4; Basketball 2; Football 2, 3, 4; Baseball Manager 4; Track 4; Hi-Y 2, 3, 4; Cheer Leader 4; Lyford Prize Speaking Contest 3, 4.

A complimentary description of “Lonnie” Conant from his high school yearbook, The Oracle. This description was published in 1932 during his senior year. In both high school and college, Alonzo was active in a myriad of school activities.
At the Conant home, music filled the air. Lottie loved the arts and held classical music, such as that by Gilbert and Sullivan and Rodgers and Hammerstein, in high regard. Lonnie, too, was captured by the melody of the aria, the classical cadence and the brisk and lively tempo of the allegro. It seems that the stage, drama, and song suited his artistic penchant to a tee; he was an acclaimed member of both the drama and glee clubs. “He rose to great heights on the stage,” so proclaimed one of his classmates. Lonnie was one of a selected few chosen from his senior class to highlight Washington’s life in several tableau scenes during one of his graduation ceremonies.

Lonnie was a well-rounded student. He loved the arts, humanities, and athletics. He put the shot, managed the baseball squad, played basketball, and played and lettered in football. Lonnie was a member of HI-Y club, which was a leadership program at Edward Little High School. The national association philosophical statement read as follows: “Creating, maintaining and extending, through the home, school, and community, high standards of Christian character.” Lonnie was selected as part of a delegation team that conducted “good and worthy” projects that were dedicated to servicing the community and local needs. For his part, Lonnie helped coach a youth basketball team to a state championship. What might have seemed to some an exhausting schedule, for Alonzo, it was effortless. He even walked 4.8 miles round-trip from home to school each day.

Alonzo’s early years in Auburn attested to his trustworthiness and unique and natural ability to lead. As the old saying goes, “He will go a long way,” and that he did. This Conant boy who wrote, acted, debated, played football, put the shot, sang in the glee club, became a prize speaker, and who was physically, mentally, and socially aware would follow his dream to go to college.

Family lore affirmed that Lonnie’s parents, from his earliest years, had formulated a plan for his college. They scrimped and
saved to ensure that the money would be there for his advanced education. It was no secret that Lonnie’s parents praised, supported, and dearly loved their only child. They wanted him to succeed and most of all to be happy.

As 1932 approached midway, unemployment was about twenty-four percent, Amelia Earhart flew the Atlantic solo, the population of the United States was almost 125 million, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) was elected president, and Alonzo Conant Jr. graduated, one of 164, from Edward Little High School. In 1933, FDR moved quickly to restore confidence in the economy with his New Deal. And so, with national uncertainty in the air, Alonzo, the cockeyed optimist, who had a solid academic record and stellar extracurricular record with support from his teachers and principal, began his college education at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.
As FDR’s New Deal buoyed hopes of recovery from the Great Depression, Alonzo entered Bates College in the fall of 1932. Located across the Androscoggin River from his hometown of Auburn, Bates was a relatively small college of 550 students who came from a wide range of ethnic and economic backgrounds. Bates was founded in 1855 by abolitionists and was originally a Free Will Baptist Institution; it was the first coeducational college in New England. The school, originally called the Maine State Seminary, was renamed in 1864 for its biggest supporter and local industrialist Mr. Benjamin E. Bates.

The first Bates president was the Reverend Oren Burbank Cheney. Cheney served from 1855 to 1894. He strived to establish an institution where, in the words of George Chase (Bates’ second president, 1894-1919), “the rich and the poor, the highest and the humblest might mingle in equal terms in the spirit of mutual helpfulness.” Chase went on to proclaim that the school would “embody the protest against castes, classes and social tyrannies, whether originating in human slavery or in human vanity, pride and snobbishness.” It is noteworthy that in 1869, Bates was the first college in New England to graduate a woman, Mary Wheelwright Mitchell. In 1874, Henry Chandler, a Maine native,
was their first black graduate. By 1877, the college had nine black students enrolled, six of whom had been slaves. Mr. Cheney’s lofty words which touted, “the highest and the humblest might mingle in equal terms on the spirit of mutual helpfulness,” was in a manner, oblique. The fact of the matter remained that segregation occurred in housing, dining, and even student government. As evidenced some fifty years later in Alonzo’s Class of 1936 yearbook, the Student Council, which was the men’s undergraduate governing body, and the Women’s Student Government Association were separate entities. Men and women also dined and lived separately. The senior photos in the same yearbook placed all of the women’s photos in alphabetical order in front of the men’s. As far as the goal to “protest against castes, classes and social tyrannies,” of 149 senior class members in Alonzo’s class, there were no black women and only two black men. Of 200 beginning members of Alonzo’s class of 1936, 149 or sixty-five percent actually graduated. The vast majority of graduates were, like Alonzo Conant, white males. Of faculty members, forty-two were men and twelve were women, which for that day was somewhat diverse. Even though Bates College did not meet all of its lofty goals, it still was a place of social progress and fascinating diversity. And so it was Bates that provided Alonzo with a broader world view layered with new cultures, languages, and education; all that would indelibly shape his views and his life.

Lonnie welcomed his freshman class schedule. English Composition, German, Latin, Elements of Expression, Ancient History, New Testament Literature and History, and Gymnasium Work and Sports all beckoned, and he answered with enthusiasm. Four fellow freshman classmates with whom Lonnie shared many classes and extracurricular activities would prove to be young men who helped shape Lonnie’s college experience. They did not all become lifelong friends; however, each in his own right brought his life experiences and perspectives to the uncertainty of the college
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world. Alonzo would know them and interact with them for four years at Bates and beyond.

Owen Vincent Dodson was from Brooklyn, New York, one of two black classmates, and a fellow thespian. Both Owen and Lonnie were members of the 4A Players and Heelers. Dodson was an English major, while Lonnie majored in economics. An extraordinarily talented director of drama, Dodson became one of the most influential directors to ever work in black academic theater. In addition, he was one of the country’s leading African-American poets of his time. His poetry covered a broad range of subjects, styles, and forms. He wrote in black dialect as well as in the classical style. One of Dodson’s greatest contributions was that he organized the first black theater company sponsored by the State Department to tour Europe. Graduating from the Yale School of Drama, he would become the drama chair at Howard University.

Lonnie and Owen both loved Shakespeare. In 1934, in The Little Theatre at Bates, the two men displayed their acting prowess, Owen as a “hobbling old man” and Lonnie as a “tooth gritting hi-jacker” in *Macbeth*. Lonnie had never known a black man. The love of drama and the theater drew both the young black man from Brooklyn and the young white farm boy to the art of acting. Their common interests staged many discussions and debates about the history of the slave trade, the south, the Civil War, the underground railroad in Maine, civil rights, and the abuses of segregation. Later, Alonzo would study the Civil War as a lifelong passion.

Lonnie and Irving Isaacson, both economics majors, shared memberships in the Debating Council, Varsity Debating, and 4A Players. They were day students and were known by their compatriots as “townies.” Seemingly an uncomplimentary label, the truth of the matter was that they lived at home as opposed to on campus. They did so for financial reasons. In Lonnie’s case, he would walk and hitchhike to and from campus, approximately 1.7 miles. This
was not a new concept for him; he had done the same during his high school years. Lonnie was from a farm business background in Turner. He was a Protestant of English-Scottish descent. Irving, in contrast, was the son of a Russian immigrant lawyer of Jewish faith and lived in New Auburn.

Lonnie and Edmund Muskie were members of the Debating Council. An important entity, the council actually determined debating policy at Bates and promoted debating in the secondary schools of Maine and New Hampshire. Ed’s father, a Catholic Polish immigrant, owned and operated a tailor shop. In contrast to Lonnie, Irving, and Dodson, Ed was a history and government major. Ed was from the mill town of Rumford, Maine, where the International Paper and Oxford Paper companies were the town’s largest employers. Ed lived on campus where he had easy access to many opportunities for activities and college affairs, but paid full tuition for those privileges.

Max Scolnik, a fellow economics major, was the son of a Jewish immigrant business owner from Lewiston, Maine. He, along with Dodson and Muskie, lived on campus. Of the five young men, Lonnie was the sole Republican. Of the five classmates, Dobson left Maine. Conant, Isaacson, Muskie, and Scolnik would, through time, raise their families and make a living in Maine. Four of the five would become lawyers. In the late 1950s, Conant, Isaacson, and Muskie would find themselves wound in a political web. Dobson would graduate Phi Beta Kappa and receive Guggenheim, Rosenwald, and Rockefeller grants. Muskie would become the governor of Maine, a U.S. senator, and the U.S. secretary of state. Scolnik would set up a law practice in Lewiston. Conant, Isaacson, and Scolnik would work together on a community interfaith council. The successes of these five are a small sample, but they certainly frame and highlight the positive and productive influence that Bates had on these young men.

Lonnie’s first year at Bates found him cleated and suited on
the football turf, fully costumed on The Little Theatre stage, and poised behind the podium arguing his point in debates. The Bates Student newspaper dated May 10, 1933, reads, “Alonzo Conant ’36 will make his first appearance on the 4A stage as old Hornblower in the Skin Game.” This comic tragedy is a small play in three acts, written by John Galsworthy. The plot tells the story of the interaction between two very different families in rural England just after the end of the first World War. It is a story of the yin and yang of one “old money” family and one “nouveau-riche” family who plans to surround the first estate with factories. The newspaper goes on to describe Lonnie’s character as “a combination of ambition and a certain straightforward affection for his family making him a character as much to be pitied as to be despised and admired.” It is said that an actor is judged by whether he gives a convincing and believable performance; Lonnie did just that.

As the summer of 1933 approached, Lonnie struggled to piece together money for the next semester. He got a job in the Lewiston Bleachery and Dye Works as a dry-can operator. He was paid twenty dollars per week. His summer salary, July through September, amounted to approximately $160; it covered the greater part of his yearly tuition bill of $250. Living at home saved Lonnie $450 per year.

The Lewiston Bleachery and Dye Works was one of the largest and most notable such factories in the country. It employed thousands of immigrants from Canada and Europe who had pioneered to Lewiston to gain employment in the mills. There, one would find machinery for bleaching and finishing, regular shrinkage equipment, and piece-dyeing machines—all of the mechanical power that was required to finish rayon and cotton fabrics. The mill was well known for its colored sheeting, the first of its kind. Wealthy clients particularly desired the high thread count and soft texture of the Lady Pepperell bed linen. It was highly sought after and very expensive.
As a dry-can operator, Alonzo would have been responsible for six to thirty large hollow copper cylinders that were two to three feet in diameter and wide enough to carry one or two widths of cloth. The cans were arranged in a long series of two tiers and geared to run together; they were called a set or range. Alonzo would have been working in a hot, humid, and dusty room where he would have to lift, pull, and push large cylinders and heavy cotton. He would have been working in a mechanical maze of machinery that, more often than not, malfunctioned in a second without warning. In short, it was a job for a strong and smart man. It was also a dirty and dangerous job! By 1933, about twenty percent of Maine’s manufacturing workers were on the street, laid off, due to the economic collapse and bankruptcies. Remarkably, Alonzo was able to gain employment at the mill in the summer and during the school year; he also had a night job there as a watchman.

Back at Bates for a second year, Alonzo’s class load included Argumentation, Biography, Principles and Problems, American Government and Politics, and Classical Civilization both semesters. During the day, he attended classes. At night, he was a security guard for the Bates Mill. Fortunately, he was able to study sporadically throughout the night and then the next morning would be back at the Bates campus for classes. More mornings than not, Lonnie walked straight to school from the mill without returning home to rest, wash, or eat breakfast.

Lonnie learned some summer lessons in that hot, old can room. Even though Lonnie’s mother and aunt had been mill workers, they had been measured when it came to discussing their experiences. Lonnie, on the other hand, had much to say about his newfound appreciation for the safety issues, pay disparity, and the mill owner’s lack of worker appreciation. Lonnie saw the humility and hard work of his fellow workers; he respected them because he shared their struggles. Alonzo did not work there again, but in 1934 when the United Textile Workers of America called a general
strike, Lonnie felt sadness and compassion for the workers. Sadly, the Lewiston press and clergy supported the mill owners against the strike. Mill workers were denied relief, humiliated, and discriminated against for striking; the strike failed. The failed strike meant that the workers returned to work in a weakened position and in some cases were fired with no recourse.

In Alonzo's sophomore year, Varsity Debating Squad, 4A Players, and Sophomore Prize Debates, along with his staff duties for the class newspaper, kept him engaged and enthused. "The play's the thing," touted Lonnie as he continued his love of acting. Issues of *The Bates Student* newspaper from October 11, 1933, and March 21, 1934, gave credence to Lonnie's acting savoir faire. From eighty-five candidates, Lonnie was chosen to play the Mate in Eugene O'Neill's *Ile*. Lonnie delivered lines such as "Aye, aye, Sir. You'll git the ile [oil] right enough, Sir," and mastered the dialect, accent, and body language. In the March 1934 production of *Macbeth*, Alonzo was one of three dozen players that "in harmonious cooperation" and "good chemistry" put forth a "believable effort." Professor Grosvenor M. Robinson, the faculty advisor and former teacher of expression and professor at Yale Divinity School, was fond of quoting Sanford Meisner's book on acting: "An ounce of emotion is worth a pound of words." Lonnie loved that quote and by all accounts had that concept down pat.

The summer recess of 1934 found Alonzo working on the Maine coast at the Black Point Inn, Prouts Neck. The famous inn was built in 1878 by the Kahler family. Its colorful history included railroad barons, political leaders, and one of Maine's most famous native sons, world-renowned artist Winslow Homer. After Prohibition, Black Point Inn's Oak Room became Prouts Neck's first speakeasy. During World War II, the Black Point Inn continued to thrive, while many resorts were demolished and some were consumed by fire. There, Lonnie performed general hotel work from July to September. Instead of working at the mill, he found
himself as a service provider who was at the beck and call of the upper-crust, wealthy people from Boston, New York, and beyond. They were uppity and at times condescending. However, he had a job in the midst of the Great Depression, and the $280 paid for his junior year at Bates. When Lonnie had a few hours off, he would take long walks along the waterline of Prouts Neck. Years later, as Lonnie returned with his family to walk the coastline that he had walked so many times before, he told his daughters how Native American Indians had come to fish the sea, followed by the colonizing English settlers in the sixteen hundreds. The name Black Point was inspired by the dense pine forest reflecting in the water, making it appear dark. Lonnie’s girls loved the way their father painted vivid pictures with the stories of his youth.

As Lonnie’s junior year began, his classes included Greek Drama, Public Speaking, Business Organization, Europe from the Early Renaissance to 1789, Principles of Sociology, and Physical Geology. As the fall semester started, an issue of The Bates Student dated October 24, 1934, reported under “Debating News” that Lonnie had been selected as a new Debating Council member along with eleven other junior classmates. The January 23 copy of The Bates Student discussed Lonnie being chosen as one of three members of the Debating Council to speak to the YW/YM Association. As the Debating Council was charged with debating policy and promoting debating in secondary schools, the choice of Alonzo to go into the community and represent Bates College was a huge compliment. On March 28, 1935, The Bates Student reported that Lonnie was named to serve as one of the judges for the preliminaries in the Maine division of the Bates Debating League, a high-school competition.

As a debater, Lonnie was under the tutelage of Professor Brooks Quimby, a 1918 Bates graduate who had been the head of the history department at Deering High School in Portland prior to teaching at Bates in 1927. Quimby eventually became chair of
the Speech Department at Bates and was a highly respected professor. Teaching his students to argue with sincerity, Quimby once said, “We have plenty of lawyers in the country who will defend any position for a fee; we need more men and women who speak effectively in support of their convictions.” Quimby was adamant that his debaters be precise in their research, documentation, preparation, and substance. The ability to think on his feet and to convince people that his ideas were worth listening to would prove to be one of Lonnie’s great talents; he would go on to Peabody Law School and become editor in chief of the *Peabody Law Review*. According to his wife, Ruperta, Lonnie was said to have been one of Professor Quimby’s outstanding debaters.

As President Roosevelt, with his New Deal, was giving himself credit for having stopped the downward spiral, unemployment had fallen from its high around twenty-five percent down to around seventeen percent. Lonnie was thrilled that Roosevelt’s National Labor Relations Board had the power to investigate and decide unfair labor practice issues and to conduct elections in which workers could decide whether they wanted union representation. Not only would workers benefit from better working conditions, but higher wages would produce greater purchasing power to grow the economy. It was a slow recovery. But, with the New Deal, the economy was coming out of the Depression.

As Lonnie’s junior year wound down, he was notified by the Black Point Inn that they wanted him back, would pay at the same rate as the previous summer, and that he would be eligible for a promotion. Folks were coming to Maine resorts, and the Black Point Inn was thriving. Back at the Black Point Inn for his second summer, Lonnie would be paid eighteen dollars per week with room, board, and uniform included; tips would provide added needed income. Approximately $300 in summer pay ensured that he would return to Bates for his senior year with a measure of financial stability.
The fall of 1936 marked Alonzo's return to Bates for his senior year. In October, Alonzo was chosen for the Debating Council, and as a tackle for the defensive and offensive football squads. The Bates Student of September 26, 1935, stated that "One of the year's surprises is Alonzo Conant, 190 pound senior. Unimpressive in his work the past two seasons, he has greatly improved and will undoubtedly see plenty of action." This description was a strange backhanded compliment, to be sure! One might take offense, but not Lonnie. Proudly wearing his jersey, number 51, he played in all eight scheduled games. As described in The Bates College Mirror of 1936, "The 1935 Garnet eleven, probably the strongest Bates eleven in recent years, played through a terrific schedule. The Bates stalwarts achieved an enviable record as they piled up large scores against Arnold and Maine, coasted to a tie in the Boston University game, and climaxed the state series by decisively defeating Colby. Easily clinching second place in the state series, Bates fielded a team with a truly tricky running attack, an aerial offense that quite consistently clicked and a strong defense." Two of the games were played in Lewiston, one in Brunswick, one in Waterville, and the remaining were played in New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. This meant that, for Alonzo, travelling with the debating team was impossible. In those days, the student body regarded a debate much in the same light as a good football game. One might conclude that Alonzo was a duel gamer. Even as a young man, Alonzo believed that to fulfill one's potential, one must be ready for life with the education of both the mind and body.

As June 1936 approached, finals began, and soon it was time for the Seventieth Annual Commencement. On June 15, 144 men and women of the Class of 1936 received diplomas. "So long; all you folks!" is the last quotation in the official 1936 Almanac. "So long" meant a goodbye to Bates. Lonnie had applied to only one law school, Peabody Law School in Portland, Maine, and he had been accepted.
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The Bates College football team in 1936. Alonzo Conant, a tackle in his senior year, is in the first row, second from the left. In addition to football, Alonzo was active in the college’s debating society, drama club, speakers’ bureau, and the student newspaper.

Alonzo Conant as he appeared in the Bates college yearbook, The Mirror (1936). Alonzo was twenty-one years of age when he graduated with a B.S. degree in economics from Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

Just a few days after graduation, Lonnie found himself in North Stratford, New Hampshire, astride a jackhammer, working for the New Hampshire Public Service Company rebuilding and repairing dams. This job was a result of federal funds via Roosevelt’s New Deal. It was on April 8, 1935, that the government had enacted the Works Progress Administration (WPA).
The WPA started building roads, bridges, and dams across the country. The work was physically demanding; dirty dust coated his lungs, the reverberations beat his body, and the noisy machine halted his hearing, but Lonnie was no stranger to hard physical work. Mr. Frank McCormack, superintendent of the construction unit, was an early mentor to Lonnie. The long rigorous hours as a laborer at $30.00 per week from June to September, or approximately $360.00 total, would afford him his first year at Peabody Law School.

As Lonnie looked forward to higher education and the study of law, the country reelected President Franklin Roosevelt in a landslide election over Republican governor Alf Landon of Kansas. Only two states were won by Governor Landon—Maine and Vermont. Even Kansas resoundingly voted for Roosevelt. The country was clearly becoming more progressive with the reelection of a Democratic president, yet Maine and Vermont persisted in support of a conservative ideology.
CHAPTER 3

Law School and Apprenticeship

All men who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education.

—Sir Walter Scott

In the fall of 1936, amidst local, national, and looming international turbulence, Lonnie headed to law school. In his own state, the Passamaquoddy tidal hydroelectric project designed to attract industry to a depressed Washington County in Downeast Maine was in trouble, and one thousand workers were laid off. As the U.S. Senate voted to end the project, the seven million dollars in federal funding had built the Quoddy Village and only two small dams. It was a hard blow to Downeast Mainers, who had been hoping for a better economy. In the mills of Auburn and Lewiston, worker dissatisfaction with low pay and poor work conditions continued to grow. This unrest eventually led to one of the most violent strikes in Maine’s history. The walkouts closed or crippled nineteen shoe factories in the Twin Cities.

With the nation still in the throes of the Depression, Alonzo would not be deterred from pursuing his law degree. Asking Lonnie if he wanted to be a lawyer was like checking his pulse to see if he was alive. He felt that the study of law and its application would ensure that he would be well equipped on a myriad of levels. He wanted to be a positive influence in his hometown of Auburn, and he knew that his advanced education would help in that way.
Peabody Law School was located at 110 Exchange Street in Portland, Maine. It was the only law school in the state of Maine from 1927 to 1941. Historically, however, the University of Maine College of Law had been established in Bangor in 1898; it was located on the third floor of the Exchange Building on the corner of State and Exchange streets, and was a charter member of the Association of American Law Schools. Sadly, it was destroyed in the great fire of 1911. Subsequently, the school was relocated in the Merrill Estate building at the corner of Union and Second streets. If one can imagine it, only five scorched books were rescued from the original library, a hard reminder of that horrible fire. As the United States entered World War I and student enrollment declined for the 1917–1918 school year, the financial difficulties for the school were overwhelming. In 1920, the University of Maine Board of Trustees voted to close the College of Law. At that time, Clarence Peabody was the last acting dean of the College of Law. In 1927, to fill the legal training void, Clarence Peabody created a private institution, the Peabody Law School. The Maine Legislature passed a law so that Peabody graduates could sit for the bar exam. Ironically, due to World War II and plummeting enrollment—and Peabody’s death—the school closed its doors in 1941.

It was of the utmost importance for Lonnie to go to a law school that was affordable and close to home. Lonnie’s parents were older, he was an only child, money was tight, and he felt that to incur additional debt was irresponsible. Given his circumstances, Lonnie’s only choice for law school was Peabody; he was excited to be accepted by them, and the school was happy to have him. In the fall of 1936, Alonzo entered Peabody. According to the Maine Law Reference Library in an e-mail to the author dated October 6, 2014, “The Peabody Law School was a very small school. Most students lived in Portland.” To keep expenses down, Alonzo would take the train or hitch rides to Portland from Auburn. During the week, he carried a heavy class load, stayed in a rented room, and paid for it on a weekly basis.
In April of 1937, press releases in both the *Lewiston Daily Sun* and *The Bates Student* newspapers announced: “Conant, Editor of Peabody Law Review.” It is not certain that Lonnie had expectations of making a name for himself, yet he certainly did. As a first-year, high-ranking student, and with his professors’ recommendations, he was elected editor in chief of the *Peabody Law Review*. His sense of fairness coupled with his respect for the right to have differing opinions, no doubt, were determining factors in his selection. He remained the chief editor from June 1936 to December 1937.

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After graduating from Bates College, Alonzo Conant attended the Peabody Law School in Portland, Maine. There, he was editor in chief for the *Peabody Law Review*, which analyzed and discussed various technical law topics. At the time, the *Peabody Law Review* was the only legal publication in Maine.

The journal was published quarterly in April, June, December, and February by the Peabody Law Review Association, which was a nonprofit educational corporation. The journal was Maine’s only technical law publication at that time. The law review was a scholarly journal focusing on legal issues and published by an organization of students at the law school. The articles were generally written by law professors, judges, and legal practitioners.
with shorter pieces called “notes” and “comments” written by law student members of the law review. The articles were of interest to legal scholars, students, legislators, and members of the practicing bar. They often expressed the thinking of specialists regarding problems related to current law and offered potential solutions to those problems. Historically, law review articles have been influential in development of the law and are often cited as persuasive authority by the courts in the United States.

As the editor, Lonnie had the final responsibility for the quality of the Peabody Law Review. He was responsible for the complete and final edit of each piece of legal scholarship that was published, and he made the final selection of articles, notes, comments, essays, book reviews, and other items. His job required commitment, diligence, attention to detail, analysis, strong writing skills, and capable editing skills. Lonnie oversaw all aspects of the publication. He was not paid for his effort; however, the editorship was an opportunity to sharpen his leadership and editorial skills.

Two writings by Lonnie for the journal are pieces entitled “Raised Bar Requirements in Maine” (June 1937) and “Doctrine of Res Ipsa Loquitur as Applied Generally to Maine Automobile Law” (December 1937). They both discussed timely legal topics. The first, an editorial, discussed the question of whether a two-year college course or the trending three-year general education requirement, as recommended by the American Bar Association, was the most desirable for bar admission. Lonnie’s thesis editorial statement regarding the new standards and provisions stressed that with progress, “each profession has a duty to require of its members the standard of excellence necessary for the protection of the general public.”

In the second piece, Lonnie carefully analyzed the legal doctrine of res ipsa loquitur (a stated legal principle that is widely accepted) as: “a rule of evidence which, where applicable, warrants but does not compel the inference of negligence from circumstantial
facts.” In layman’s terms, unless there are strong mitigating circumstances that prove otherwise, a person is guilty of negligence and hence responsible. He goes on to note that in such cases, a jury is required to decide the facts in issue.

Lonnie’s penchant for critical legal writing, editing, and scholarship, and his intrigue for the study of law reverberated through his daily routine during his two years at Peabody Law School. As the summer of 1937 came and went, Lonnie worked in Grovetown, New Hampshire as a jackhammer operator repairing a small dam. Once again, he worked for Mr. Frank McCormack and was paid $30.00 per week for a total summer wage of $360.00. The work wages paid tuition for his second year at Peabody Law School.

As the fall semester elapsed to spring, Alonzo’s personal life would be dealt a devastating blow. On January 6, 1938, Lonnie’s father died. He had been in ill health for several months as he suffered with kidney failure. The sorrow of his father’s death affected Lonnie deeply. His father and mother had celebrated the achievements of their only son when he was elected to serve in the prestigious position of editor in chief. They were so proud of him. Then, just eight months later, Alonzo Sr. was gone at age seventy-seven.

Immediately, Lonnie returned to Auburn to write his father’s obituary, prepare all of the funeral arrangements, and support his grieving mother. She was inconsolable. Alonzo Sr. was buried in the family plot at Riverside Cemetery in Lewiston, Maine. His headstone reads: “Alonzo Conant, Sr./Dec. 25, 1861/Jan. 6, 1938.” Alonzo Sr. had been fifty-three years of age when young Lonnie was born, which to some may seem too old to rear a young lad properly, but to Alonzo Sr., the birth of his son was welcomed and wanted. Lonnie would recount the ways in which his father’s patience, honesty, guiding hand, and strong work ethic served as cornerstones to his success in business and to his competence
as a loving and supportive parent. At twenty-four years of age, Lonnie was fatherless and halfway through his second year in law school. When the formality of the funeral was over, Lonnie had to make hard decisions regarding his education. He did complete his remaining second semester but as stated on his official records, “due to financial reasons” did not return to Peabody Law School to finish his final year.

The financial constraints on the family that denied Lonnie’s return to school were real and raw, but Lonnie would not be denied his educational objective. He would study in the law office of Alton C. Wheeler as an apprentice. He did so for fourteen months in preparation taking the Maine bar exam (Lewiston Saturday Journal; Aug. 4, 1939).

The formal apprenticeship model of balancing the theoretical and practical ensured that an employer would receive inexpensive labor and that they could train workers to their own specifications. That model fell by the wayside as a method for training lawyers decades ago in the United States. When legal apprenticeships were gone, it ended a tradition that went back to frontier days, when prospective attorneys “read the law” under the tutelage of a practicing lawyer. The best-known self-taught attorney was Abraham Lincoln. As history has it, he borrowed legal books from a fellow lawmaker to complete the task. Most states now require a law degree in order to join the bar. States that still allow law-office study include California, Maine, New York, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming. The options are even fewer for correspondence study, which is allowed only in California, New Mexico, and the District of Columbia. Currently, the number of self-taught lawyers has dropped, even as a wealth of material about the law has become available on the Internet (e.g.; boston.com; “Self-taught Lawyers;” Jan. 19, 2008). For Lonnie, his apprenticeship meant that he was able to start earning money to support his mother and the family home, and to gain and secure knowledge that he would
need for the bar exam. This type of education wasn't for everyone, but for Lonnie, it worked.

It is not known where, when, or how Lonnie first met Alton C. Wheeler. However, we do know that Mr. Wheeler was a 1899 Bates graduate. He was a successful attorney who started a general practice of law in South Paris, Maine, in 1904. Further, he was a member of the Oxford County Bar Association and the American Bar Association. He served as a Republican in the state legislature from 1911 to 1913, was a trustee of the University of Maine, and was a member of the board of overseers of Bates College, 1920 to 1924. In addition to his law practice, Alton was one of the incorporators of the South Paris Savings Bank.

To Alonzo's credit, on July 7, 1939, at age twenty-five, he passed the Maine bar exam with much local fanfare. Examinations were offered twice per year. One exam was given in Bangor on the first Tuesday in February, and one in Portland on the first Tuesday in August. The exam was written on the principles of common law as it is applied to the following subjects: real property, torts, evidence, pleading, contracts, bill and notes, criminal law, and equity. Lonnie took his exam in Portland.

The headline on page 14 of the Lewiston Daily Sun from August 5, 1939, read: “31 Candidates Pass Maine Bar Exams. Alonzo Conant, Jr. of Auburn First with a Mark of 88.” The article went on to note: “Of 31 who successfully passed the Maine bar examinations in Portland this week Alonzo Conant Jr. of Auburn held the highest rank. It was announced by Edward W. Atwood, secretary of the Maine Board of Bar Examiners, Friday night. Conant’s rank was 88. Alonzo Conant, Jr., who lives at 650 Center Street, Auburn, is the son of the late Alonzo Conant. He is a graduate of Edward Little High School and Bates College ’36. He attended Peabody Law School at Portland for two years and while there was editor of the Peabody Law Review. He was president of the Young Republican club organized in Auburn during the
'38 campaign. For the past 14 months he has studied in the office of Alton C. Wheeler, Auburn attorney.” The article also mentions three Lewiston men who passed the exam, Joseph Margolin, Irving Isaacson and Maxim Scholnik. Isaacson and Scholnik had been Alonzo’s classmates at Bates. The paths of these three young men had crossed for a second time; it would not be the last time. Irving Isaacson had gone to Harvard Law School ’39, Maxim Scholnik went to Boston University ’39. Compared to his contemporaries, Alonzo did not have the benefit of a four-year law school. Instead, he completed two years at Peabody Law School and a fourteen-month apprenticeship with directed readings.

On September 6, 1940, Alonzo was admitted to the Maine Bar Association. He was humble and respectful about his accomplishments; he knew what he had committed his energies to, and with hard work and dedication he had achieved his goal.

Having worked in a mill himself, having family members who were mill laborers, and seeing the turmoil and the consequences of labor strikes, Lonnie was determined to advance his education in the field of law. And so he did; Lonnie was truly the chief hand in his own education.
CHAPTER 4

Legislator and Law Enforcer

*Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow-men.*
 —Mahatma Gandhi

A lonzo was living the American dream. He had graduated from Bates College and had gone to Peabody Law School, where he excelled in his law studies. The ultimate evidence that he was accomplished in law was recognized when he earned the highest score on the Maine bar exam. He had outscored all of his contemporaries across the board. Unlike himself, all had gone to prestigious law schools. Antithetically, he had lost his beloved father to kidney failure and was heartbroken to see his mother in a state of melancholy; she had always been confident in her own sense of self. Lonnie’s life had undergone a powerful reshaping, yet he continued on his path through life with his pragmatic keep-your-eye-on-the-ball style. As a self-employed lawyer, Alonzo opened his Auburn law office at 84 Main Street in September of 1939.

Lonnie had always wanted to influence society at large and specifically his home state and hometown. Logically, being a part of activities associated with governance was the thing to do. As somewhat of a rising star, he was elected vice chairman of the Auburn Republican City Committee and president of the Androscoggin Young Republicans in 1940. He was a hometown boy who had “skin in the game,” and he was hard-working, organized, affable, and a skilled debater. The *Lewiston Evening Journal*
from February 7, 1940, included the following from Lonnie: "In view of the fact that at least one State Legislator from Auburn, John Marshall, is not a candidate for re-election, I desire to announce my candidacy for that office in the coming Republican primaries." Seeing his chance, Lonnie decided to run for the Maine House of Representatives in the fall of 1940. In the same article, Conant went on to say:

For over twenty-three years the city of Auburn has been my home. From the elementary grades thru high school, my educational training was received in the Auburn public school system. It was locally, at Bates College, that I received my college degree. Believing, therefore, that I know the people of this community and the problems, first-handed, which they face. It is my wish that I may be of public service in the capacity of Representative, acting in the behalf of this city.

As a Republican candidate, Lonnie was running on the 1940 Republican Party platform, which stated, in part, that: "The Republicans of Maine, in convention assembled, adopt the following state of principle upon which they as the support of the electorate of Maine in the coming election. We believe the so called New Deal experiment has run the limit of its useful course." A front-page political advertisement for Alonzo in the June 15 issue of the Lewiston Daily Sun was eye-catching and interesting. On the same page, one saw a half dozen other political ads that were generic and ordinary. They were in stark contrast to Alonzo’s slogan, which readily grabbed the reader’s attention: “For a ‘Better Deal’/Vote for Alonzo Conant/Republican Candidate for Auburn Representative to the Legislature/Monday/June 17th/ Your Support will be Appreciated.” (Lewiston Daily Sun; June 15, 1940).
Alonzo Conant’s first run for political office occurred in 1940 when he ran to represent the people of his hometown, Auburn. At age twenty-five, Conant overwhelmingly won the election to serve in Maine’s House of Representatives.

An obvious play on words, Alonzo’s “Better Deal” slogan would prove to move him forward in the June primaries. Of ten competitors, Alonzo would surpass his closest opponent by 1,296 votes. He emerged unscathed to battle four candidates in the September general election. All rivals were Republicans as not one Democrat threw a hat in the ring, lending credence to the fact that Auburn was a Republican stronghold at that time. Alonzo’s chances looked good, but he was up against seasoned politicians who had years of experience on their sides compared to his fledgling flight into the high winds of political turbulence.

The twenty-six-year-old Alonzo’s competitors were Leslie E. Jacobs, who had been a three-term state representative; Frederick Robie, who had been a one-term representative; and Ralph Mosher, who had previously run for and lost an election to become a Ward I clerk. The final tally was Conant with 4,178 votes; Robie
with 3,857 votes; Jacobs with 3,749 votes; and Mosher with 70 votes. The young lawyer had bested Frederick Robie by 321 votes, Leslie E. Jacobs by 429 votes, and Ralph Mosher by 4,108 votes. *(Lewiston Daily Sun; September 10, 1940).* Lonnie had handily outdistanced his four opponents. It was a decisive win.

In his first attempt for a state elected office, Alonzo had brought his energy and his sense of conviction to the voters—and the electorate liked what they saw. On September 9, 1940, he was elected to serve Androscoggin County as a member of the House of Representatives of Maine. Lonnie's success buoyed the spirits of his widowed mother, Lottie. Her only child, whom she adored, would serve his hometown, Auburn, as an elected and respected state legislator. The same election saw Maine senate president Sumner Sewall run against and easily defeat Democrat Fulton J. Redman for the governorship. It was the last gubernatorial race held prior to the United States entering World War II.

On December 4, 1940, fresh off his September win, Lonnie drove into Augusta, Maine—the state capitol—with the wind at his back. As he drove down Western Avenue and turned right on State Street, the cold winter sun shone on the beautiful State House building as it came into view. The structure had been designed by the renowned architect Charles Bulfinch of Boston, who had also designed the Capitol Building in Washington D.C.; it had been designed to mirror the Capitol building of Massachusetts. For three years, the granite, which was mined from Hallowell quarries, was hauled and put in place by locally owned oxen. On January 4, 1832, the Maine legislature held its first session in the new state capitol. One hundred and eight years later, Lonnie entered the very same building. As he looked up at the rising height of 185 feet, the enormity of the beautiful copper dome and all that it represented filled Alonzo with excitement. He had chosen civic duty, and he was committed to do his level best.

Representative Conant was one of 149 members of the 1941
Ninetieth Legislature, and his seat in the legislative gallery was No. 19. In the Biographical Sketches of The Members of the Senate and House of Representatives of Maine, Alonzo describes himself as “Always a Republican.” Lonnie knew that with determination and tenacity, he could help the good folks of Maine by finding ways to use existing laws for best good use and legislate new laws to improve their daily lives and keep their communities safe. He quickly got involved and was assigned to the Federal Relations, Motor Vehicles, and Temperance committees.

In September 1940, one year after Germany invaded Poland, Alonzo was jettisoned into elected office. That horrific event plus the ensuing blitzkrieg by Hitler into western Europe and the fall of France boosted defense spending and brought the state of Maine and the nation out of the Depression. Maine’s economy grew as the New England Shipbuilding Corporation won a British contract for thirty cargo ships. On its heels, the U.S. Merchant Marines contracted for Liberty ships to be built in South Portland. The two shipyards in South Portland produced nearly 270 ships in just two and a half years. These ships were aptly described as “marvelous” by Churchill and were the “tools” that he asked Roosevelt for so that Britain could “finish the job.” They would transport military units and keep them supplied; these Allied merchant fleets could carry ten thousand deadweight tons of cargo, something aircraft could not accomplish. They were true workhorses. The contracts for the Liberty ships were part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Lend-Lease Act, which was passed on March 11, 1941. This new military aid bill would provide supplies needed by any country whose security was vital to the defense of the United States. The distaste for entering the war resounded throughout the country, but the sending of supplies was palatable.

Shipbuilding and Marine Railway Company and the Boothbay companies of Goudy and Stevens, Hodgdon Brothers, and Harvey F. Gamage built wooden torpedo patrol boats,
JUDGE ALONZO CONANT (1914–1962)

minesweepers, and auxiliary vessels for the Navy. As Maine became the focus for naval operations in the North Atlantic, Portland became a key anchorage for the Atlantic destroyer fleet. Portland and its outlying community was impacted in a positive way. The population, the increasing real estate values, and the business boom turned the area into a bustling industrial area. However, the dark cloud of war blackened the once-welcoming harbor. The steel mesh across the harbor’s mouth, and the ammo bunkers on Peaks Island, were a true and terrible tarot card of things to come.

Back in Augusta, Lonnie was making a name for himself as he wended his way through the noxious waters of local politics. Even as a freshman representative, he was unafraid to put up a strong fight on the floor of the House of Representatives or to call a mass meeting in Lewiston City Hall.

In the 1940s, the pulp and paper mills on the Androscoggin River north of Auburn and Lewiston dumped fiber wastes directly into the river, producing thousands of tons of oxygen-depleting decay. The waste effectively contaminated the once pristine rolling river, which years earlier had welcomed the white birch canoes of the Native Americans who came to hunt and to fish the salmon and the trout that had abounded in the river. The private firm of Metcalf and Eddy from Boston assessed the river for Central Maine Power Company; the results were never made public or published. The effect of the hydrogen sulfite smell was revolting and foul. The good folks of the two cities were enraged, and they demanded answers. As they would not be placated, they went directly to Representative Conant for answers.

When the outcries reached the sympathetic ears of Alonzo, he answered in kind by putting words to action. However, not one to jump the gun, Alonzo first took a wait-and-see approach regarding the scheduled meeting of the Maine Sanitary Water Board, the governor, and his council. If they agreed to provide funds for an independent chemical survey regarding the odor, then Conant
would be satisfied that progress was being made. If not, Conant would proceed with an open meeting to air the concerns of the citizenry and further press for a special session of the legislature to address the issue. Conant was fair, focused, and fearless; the health and safety of his community were at stake.

As history would have it, the matter was brought before the Maine Sanitary Water Board, which took action, and late in August of that year, the same firm of Metcalf and Eddy was hired for a second time to survey the river. This time the results were not only revealed and reviewed, but an action plan was put in place. This time something would get done; a fledgling river recovery had begun. Representative Conant hadn't needed to move forward with his mass meeting at Lewiston City Hall, but he had answered the call by putting a voice to a public safety issue.

In spite of the best efforts of the committee and board members to negotiate and secure cooperation with the operators of industries along the river, it was necessary to take legal action. Frank I. Cowan, attorney general of Maine, brought suit against the Brown Company, International Paper Company, and Oxford Paper Company (State of Maine, Report of the Attorney General, 1941-1942, pp. 26-28). In 1948, seven years later, the Federal Water Pollution Control Act was passed. The law created a comprehensive set of water quality programs along with some state and local financing, but enforcement was limited to interstate waters. In 1972, the Clean Water Act was passed; it was the first major U.S. law to address water pollution, and the author of the act was Lonnie's old classmate from Bates, Ed Muskie. Even after Lonnie's death, their paths continued to cross. The nexus would continue; the pieces of Lonnie's political path pressed on.

In the business of legislating, Lonnie was keenly aware that dispute resolution had emotional and legal components. The question of taxes had been a contentious issue for decades. From 1910 on, the complicated question of federal and state income tax
in Maine had its share of fiery debates. The good folks of Maine just couldn’t and wouldn’t ratify the tax until 1969. The question regarding the state’s sales tax looked Lonnie straight in the face in his first few months as a state representative. In a lengthy interview that was published in the April 14, 1941, Lewiston Evening Journal paper, he was quoted as saying, “I will not be a party to any compromise in regard to the matter of the sales tax. The time may come when the state must have one, but it certainly will not be in the form of the present bill. I feel that the present bill is inequitable, economically unsound at the present time, abhorrent to the American way of living, far too complicated, and certainly a bill that should NOT be incorporated into our tax structure.”

Alonzo, obviously not a shrinking violet, confirmed that he would put up a strong fight on the floor of the House of Representatives against the proposed combination sales tax and property tax exemption bill. Eight years later, in 1949, GOP Governor Frederick Payne, as others had done before him, pushed for the income tax; he had to settle for the state’s first sales tax in 1951, ten years after Lonnie had fought against a similar bill.

Legislating was pitchy, messy, and slow, but Alonzo showed that he had the passion and common sense needed to anticipate, debate, and act on critical issues. He was comfortable calling open meetings. A student of Robert’s Rules of Order, he ran meetings with more than just a modicum of organization, and he had contacts in the local newspapers to put the word out when needed. His easy manner facilitated any discussion and ameliorated the task of getting something done on behalf of the folks of Maine. His choice to work for the welfare of others suited him well.

With legislative knowledge in hand, and growing maturity and experience on his vitae, Alonzo was on the radar of the Maine Liquor Commission. Opportunity knocked, and he took the time to assess his options. The job offered was full-time and had a stable income. As most legislators of his time, he had been
patching together two part-time jobs, legislator in Augusta and self-employed general practice lawyer in Auburn. He had an apartment in Augusta during the week days, travelling back and forth to Auburn to attend to his attorney work, then returning to Auburn for the weekends to help his mother. As a widow, his mother had a limited income; Lonnie helped his mother manage the homestead and supported her financially.

Ultimately, in October of 1941, Alonzo decided to take the job that was offered to him and become Director of the Enforcement Division with the added responsibility as the prosecuting counsel. Having fulfilled one year of his two-year term, he left the House of Representatives; he would try his hand at elective office one more time in 1954. Alonzo would lead the commission’s legal work until March 1943 when he was given a leave of absence for the war; he would resume the reins as director upon his return from the war in the spring of 1946.

Alonzo’s headquarters were located on the grounds of the Augusta Airport. His official telephone number was Augusta 1200, extension 67. As Director of Enforcement and prosecuting attorney, he earned $3,380.00 yearly. His supervisor, the commission’s chairman, was Mr. Wilbur H. Towle.

The following description of Alonzo’s employment with the commission, in his own words, was taken from his official military records: “I am responsible for the direction of agents in the apprehension and prosecution of all violations of liquor laws of the State of Maine, and the prosecution, personally, of the violators of said laws in Courts of competent jurisdiction and before Maine Liquor Commission.” Alonzo supervised twenty-six field agents. But there was a backstory to Lonnie’s appointment. He had been hand-picked to clean up a management system mess. He stepped into an organization that had been dissolved by a legislative order, reorganized, and restructured. Due to some wrongdoing, and with unclear laws, the commission was structurally changed; an
Enforcement Division was instituted, whereby Lonnie took the reins as the director, prosecuting counsel, and chief inspector.

In a formal statement published in the *State of Maine Report of the Attorney General 1941–1942*, Attorney General Frank L. W. Cowan wrote that the Maine Liquor Commission had been dissolved by legislative order. The following is his statement: “During the year 1941, as a result of complaints received, I conducted an investigation of the activities of the State Liquor Commission. My investigations disclosed a disregard of the mandatory provisions of the law governing the revocation of licenses and the conduct of beer parlors. As a result of the evidence presented at a public hearing, the executive body voted to remove the Commission.” The report went on: “Immediately upon assuming office in October, 1941, The Maine State Liquor Commission created an Enforcement Division with duties and responsibilities separate and distinct from previous Liquor Commission Enforcement Units. Prior to that time the Chief Inspector and a staff of Inspectors had carried out statutory duties and policed licensees of said Commission.” The reports identify the Director of Enforcement as Alonzo Conant of Auburn, a practicing attorney. It also identifies the Assistant Director as Ralph Ketchen, a former director of the Alcohol Division, which was consolidated into the Enforcement Division.

In the United States, each state has the authority to regulate the production, sale, and distribution of alcohol within its borders. That is to say, the state and local jurisdictions may have their own requirements in addition to federal requirements. State laws and regulations vary widely from state to state and may be more restrictive than federal regulations. Historically, the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibited the manufacture, sale, transport, import, or export of alcoholic beverages. The amendment was ratified on January 16, 1919, and took effect one year later. In 1920, the National Prohibition Act was
passed. Prohibition, failing fully to enforce sobriety and costing billions, soon lost support in the early 1930s. Nineteen thirty-three saw the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution passed and ratified; it ended national prohibition.

Couched in the history of booze, its effects, and its criminal and sociological impacts on society, Lonnie took on the burden of regulation. He was the founding Enforcement Director of the newly minted Enforcement Division. The division's reputation would come to be known as more legal, fair, and ethical—a testament to Alonzo's fine reputation. He oversaw the training of his field agents in law, educated and assisted the licensees concerning the liquor laws, and provided instruction on criminal investigative procedure and courtroom techniques. In addition, he supervised a new and more streamlined reporting system and criminal docket. As the post-prohibition-repeal era went forward, Alonzo's job, with all of its complexities and responsibilities, would prove to be rewarding. He was a skilled communicator, competent lawyer, organizational genius, and he loved his job.

With love blooming, war looming, and a full-time job well in hand, Alonzo's life was about to experience major changes.
CHAPTER 5

Marriage and National Service

Who so loves believes the impossible.
—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

War is hell.
—William Tecumseh Sherman

Nine months and fourteen days after his first day on the job with the Liquor Commission, Lonnie married a beautiful young nurse from Vassalboro, Maine. Her name was Ruperta Helen Turner. The couple first met in a clinical, unromantic setting.

In the fall of 1939, some days after sitting for the Maine bar exam, and with pillow in hand, Alonzo was admitted to Central Maine General Hospital in Lewiston, Maine. For months, Lonnie had been in considerable pain with a pilonidal cyst. He needed a surgical procedure but had delayed doing so until he had completed his exams. As he settled into his hospital room, awaiting surgery, a young student nurse introduced herself and informed Lonnie that she would be caring for him during his recovery. She was a natural beauty. Her high cheekbones, flawless skin, and big blue eyes penciled a perfect portrait. As she flashed her wide smile and voiced her kind words, Lonnie took note. He was smitten.

Ruperta was the only daughter—the third child of four—of Affa Lincoln Andrews Turner and Myron Stillman Turner. She was born on August 30, 1919, delivered at home by Dr. C. W. Abbott, and she was literally a three-dollar baby. It was a pittance compared
to the cost of a hospital birth. It is interesting to note that during that time, with maternal mortality at its height, the hospitals were attracting more women for birthing. In 1921, two years after Ruperta’s birth, thirty to fifty percent of women gave birth in hospitals.

As a young girl, Ruperta enjoyed the rural environs of Vassalboro, Maine. Her brothers said that “she ran like the wind!” She played, picked eggs, ate the family pig, fed the bay carriage horse, Brownie—whom she loved—milked the Guernsey cow, and watched as her father slit the throats and hung the chickens for the family’s food. She was a plucky little tomboy, and she was feisty.

The Depression was little felt by her family, as the acreage was self-sustaining. In addition to running the family farmstead, her father travelled each day to oversee the nearby Burnham and Morrell corn factory. He was the superintendent there. Her mother, Affa, not only took care of the children at home, she wrote a column for the local newspaper, was an esteemed member of the Eastern Star, and had served as the Noble Grand in the Rebekah lodge. Ruperta would often tell her daughters, “Mummy was a teacher at the young age of sixteen. Her students were twice her size and often times, years older! That’s what kind of stock I come from, smart and tough!” Sadly, Ruperta lost her mother at the tender age of eight. Her mom was only thirty-four. The time and pneumonia took her life. Ruperta, her brothers, and her father were devastated. As Affa lay in her coffin in the family living room, young Ruperta wept, she felt so alone. There would be no more of her mother’s tender hugs, lessons, and love.

Education was important in the Turner family. Ruperta went to Coburn Classical Institute in Waterville. Given the expense of the school and the distance from her home, Ruperta worked for her room and board in a local resident’s home. She resided there during the week and returned to Vassalboro for the weekend. Ruperta would tell her daughters: “That woman treated me like a dog! I took my classes during the day, then I would wash and iron
clothes, clean the house, wash the evening dishes, and then go to bed. I missed my mother so very much.” But Ruperta excelled in her studies. She designed, fashioned, and made her own clothes; she knitted, crocheted, and taught herself those skills, all without the influence of a mother. Ruperta was filled with creativity.

Nine years after her mother’s death, Ruperta’s father, Myron, married Miss Laura Foye Knowlton. At forty-seven years old, she was seven years Myron’s junior, from Vassalboro, and very accomplished. She had graduated from Farmington Normal School, taught school for several years, and become a registered nurse. She had also graduated from the Newton, Massachusetts hospital and then went on to become a representative of the National American Red Cross, which was based in Washington, D.C. In that role, Laura was in charge of the New England region of the Red Cross.

It would be Laura who encouraged Ruperta to go to nursing school. Of the two influential women in Ruperta’s life, Affa was the traditional mother and wife with a strong and independent spirit, and Laura was the nontraditional, well-educated, professional woman who delayed marriage to procure an education and career. Even with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, inequality with the types of jobs available and the amount of pay remunerated persisted. Jobs that were considered “women’s work,” such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial, were acceptable. However, men’s jobs, those of stature, such as physician, lawyer, banker, and business owner, were untouchable for women. Society had denied women equal rights in the workplace (and elsewhere). Women’s standing and rights in society was in a languid lull; the movement for equality was moving forward in fits and starts and with an uncertain course. Affa had put one foot into the man’s arena when she regularly wrote for the local newspaper. Laura had moved into management during the Depression. Even as women were scorned because they had the audacity to “steal” jobs from men,
both Affa and Laura worked as professionals. So too, they were accomplished and independent.

Sorrowfully, Laura, like Affa, succumbed to pneumonia. For Affa, penicillin would come too late. Penicillin, the world’s first antibiotic or bacteria killer, was an accidental discovery made by Sir Alexander Fleming on February 14, 1929, in England’s Oxford University. This was one year after Affa’s death in 1928. When Laura became ill, penicillin was available, yet it could not save her. Ruperta would speak lovingly about the importance of these two strong women in her life, and she would lament their deaths due to pneumonia.

Spending years without a mother, living in an all-male household, mothering her youngest brother, and confronting her hard boarding-school lessons all made for a tough adolescence. Yet, Ruperta emerged with a clear view of herself. As Ruperta went on to nursing school, she would meet the challenge of on-the-job training, long hours of study, and working through the night on the hospital wards with little to no rest. Often she would nap in the mop closets to catch a few moments of sleep. Ruperta knew

Ruperta Helen Turner (1919–1997) in her engagement photograph. On July 23, 1942, she and Alonzo Conant Jr. were married in Auburn, Maine. The couple met at Central Maine General Hospital in Lewiston, where Alonzo was a patient and Ruperta a nurse.
the meaning of having no money in her pocket, but she kept her focus on getting an education. Her father was able to send her five dollars a month, but little more. Ruperta was a nontraditional, self-sufficient, and hardworking young nurse, who—with discipline and pure grit—would graduate from Central Maine Medical School of nursing with honors in 1942. Her nursing would prove to solidify a career for her future, and would reveal a handsome young lawyer whom she would marry.

On July 23, 1942, at 1:30 p.m., the hot Maine summer sun shone on the wedding nuptials of Ruperta Helen Turner and Alonzo Conant. The Elm Street Universalist Church was abuzz with friends and family in full smile; congratulations abounded, and the smell of fresh flowers filled the air. Ruperta wore a jade-green tea-length lace dress fitted at the waist. A birdcage fascinator veiled her loosely waved brunette hair, revealing her high cheekbones, pink with blush. A lovely corsage of white roses completed the trousseau. Alonzo sported a dark blue, double-breasted suit. Ruperta was five feet four inches tall and petite in frame. Alonzo was six feet two inches tall, strong in stature and relaxed in demeanor. They were a handsome, educated couple. The good Reverend Weston A. Cate performed the single-ring ceremony. The day inaugurated Ruperta and Alonzo’s nineteen-year marriage. On such a happy occasion, who would know that they would be denied a lengthy union?

Following the wedding ceremony, Jane Chapin, Ruperta’s maid of honor, fellow nursing student, and best friend, along with Frank G. Fellows, Lonnie’s best man—whom he had coached through bar exams—adjourned to the DeWitt Hotel in Lewiston for a rousing reception honoring the newly married couple. Both Jane and Frank remained good friends with the Conants throughout their lives. Jane’s brother, Dr. Mylan Chapin, would diagnose Lonnie’s kidney disease in 1960, and Frank Fellows would be one of six pallbearers at Alonzo’s funeral in 1962.
The DeWitt Hotel was located on Pine Street in Lewiston. In 1854, it had been built for the Franklin Company. Its precise use was to house the invited guests of the company's directors when they came to town. It was a first-class hotel, and it stood for 111 years. The Franklin Company, together with the Bates and Hill mills, accounted for over one half of Lewiston's tax revenue.

In the 1850s, the Lewiston Water Power Company, which was owned by local entrepreneurs, developed a power site at the Lewiston falls. It sold power to the city; built canals, dams, and mill sites; encouraged the building of schools; and supported the development of Bates College. In short, it was an important consortium in Lewiston. However, due to lack of capital, they were taken over by the Franklin Water Power Company. Following the buyout, the Franklin Company built new mills: the Lewiston Bleachery (Lonnie had worked there as a can operator to pay for his tuition at Bates College), the Androscoggin Mill, and the Continental Mill. This monopoly became the center of the Lewiston landscape. Lonnie's linkage to the DeWitt Hotel was serendipitous. Not only did the couple enjoy their wedding reception there, but for years to come, Alonzo would be a guest speaker many times over and participate in enumerable political and social gatherings there.

Lonnie and Ruperta returned to Lewiston from their honeymoon on Cape Cod to begin their newly minted marriage. They resided at 466 Main Street in Lewiston, in an apartment building that was within walking distance of the hospital. The young couple was gainfully employed—Ruperta as a nurse at Central Maine General Hospital, and Lonnie as the Director of Law Enforcement for the Maine State Liquor Commission. Each day, Ruperta walked to work while Lonnie drove the thirty-three miles to Augusta. Concurrently, the country was in full war mobilization. As the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, stunned the world, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war against Japan the following day: "No matter how long it may
take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.”

America had been drawn into a global war pitting Germany, Italy, and Japan (the Axis) against the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union (the Allies). Car makers and other manufacturers were retooled to produce weapons of war. Millions of men and women entered the service, production boomed, and unemployment abated. The raising and training of a vast military force had begun.

In addition to providing material aid to its hard-pressed allies, Americans built—young and old, male and female—the “Arsenal of Democracy,” as President Roosevelt called it. Tasked to raise and train a vast military force, President Roosevelt and Congress approved the nation’s first peacetime military draft in September 1940. The Selective Service registered men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-six years of age. In November of 1942, as the United States was entangled in the war, the Selective Service expanded the draft to men aged eighteen to thirty-seven.

Following the rule of law, Alonzo registered with the Selective Service in October 1941. As he was the sole son of his widowed mother, he was assigned a 3A deferment, meaning he was exempt from military service. At that time, his mother was sixty-one years old, and she ran her own home by herself, albeit with Alonzo’s help. In April 1943, as duty called, Alonzo volunteered to become one of the ten million who went from civilian life to “citizen soldier.” Patriotism was at the soul of the Conant men, and thus, enlisting in the U.S. Army to serve as a private in Company A, 39th Infantry Training Battalion was a natural fit. *The Lewiston Weekly Journal* of December 21, 1899, aptly reported: “There were Conants in the Revolutionary War and in the various Indian wars. Winslow Conant and others went to the Civil War in the 60’s and the blood was well represented in the Spanish War.”
As infantrymen, soldiers marched and fought on foot. They would take the worst of the battle and were often called cannon fodder. Anatomically, Alonzo’s feet were unfit for the job; they were flat with bunions. Try as he may, his feet would not support the job. Through no fault of his own, the Army rejected him as a foot soldier, thanking him for his enlistment and excellent conduct. Alonzo was granted an honorable discharge.

Had Lonnie been able to serve in the 39th Infantry, he would have found himself in the first unit of United States combat troops to set foot on foreign soil on the beaches of Algiers, land at Utah Beach, fight through the rugged French countryside, see action at the Battle of the Bulge, and help secure the Remagen bridgehead and move across Germany as the Allied forces finished off the last of the German resistance. Had he lived through the many fights—the 39th incurred heavy casualties in all of those incursions—he would have seen the unit awarded the Belgian fourragère, two French Croix de Guerre with palm, the French fourragère, and three U.S. Presidential Unit Citations.

While technically exempt from duty, Alonzo nevertheless volunteered for a second time. On July 13, 1943, he enlisted in the Naval Reserves at the U.S. Navy recruiting station in Portland, Maine. Alonzo obviously was compelled to serve his country. With so many jobs to fill in the work of war, the Navy did not require foot soldiers to do their job; ships were the order of the day, and the Navy used all of the talent that came their way. The Naval Armed Guard wanted men with good eyes, ears, and teeth. They needed men who loved their country, men who were willing to sacrifice their lives for their country, and men who were able to swim. Alonzo fit the bill. He enlisted and took the oath of office as an apprentice seaman. The enlistment was a two-year commitment. He was paid $50 per month and was given $133 for a clothing allowance. Most importantly, his beneficiary document designating Ruperta to be the recipient of six months’ pay in the
event of his death was signed and witnessed. Alonzo was on his way to war.

On July 20, 1943, Alonzo reported to the naval training station in Newport, Rhode Island for recruit training. There, Alonzo sought an appointment as a commissioned officer; on July 30, he took the exam; and on August 21, he was officially commissioned by the President of the United States of America as ensign in the Naval Reserve. The official certificate read as follows: “And I do strictly charge and require all Officers, Seamen and Marines under His Command to be obedient to his orders. And he is to observe and follow such orders and directions from time to time as he shall receive from me, or the future President of The United States of

After World War II broke out, Alonzo Conant enlisted in the U.S. Navy, where he commanded armed guard units aboard three Liberty ships. In approximately one year, he rose to the rank of Lieutenant, Junior Grade (LTJG).
America, or his Superior Officer set over him, according to the Rules and Discipline of the Navy. This Commission to continue in force during the pleasure of the President of The United States for the time being.” Immediately, Alonzo purchased ten thousand dollars of life insurance for Ruperta; seven dollars a month was deducted from his fifty-dollar paycheck. His family weighed heavily on his mind.

In early September, Alonzo received an emergency call from home with the news of his mother’s unexpected hospitalization. His mother’s health was in sharp decline. In order to pay for her care, it meant that he was financially unable to keep two households going. His monthly check from the Navy would be sent directly to the healthcare facility. It meant that Ruperta had to close his mother’s home, leave their apartment, and move into her father’s home in Vassalboro. She would help her father run his home, as all of her brothers had also been called to duty. There she would await the birth of her first child. Such were the unsung sacrifices that American families had to endure to support their country during wartime.

A few weeks later, Alonzo was sent to the Armed Guard School in Norfolk, Virginia. His job was to train a gun crew of youthful sailors. Alonzo had gone from young lawyer to naval commanding officer in the U.S. Naval Armed Guard (NAG) in just a few short months. He was a part of what would be called the “Other Navy” and “Navy’s Stepchildren.” Eventually Alonzo and his young sailors would face deep danger.

Today very few people know what the Armed Guard stood for, or what it did. In fact, the NAG was a special service branch of the U.S. Navy established during World War I, and continued into World War II, to defend U.S. and Allied merchant ships from attack by enemy aircraft, submarines, and surface ships. They were Navy personnel assigned to merchant ships. Alonzo’s men were young, fearless, strong, eager, and tough. They were
gunners, radiomen, signalmen, coxswains, and boatswains. The art of transporting military units required large-scale movement of men and equipment over vast distances; keeping the fighting troops supplied was the cornerstone of winning wars and battles. The NAG serving aboard Liberty ships played an important but little-recognized role in delivering the troops, guns, and essential goods of war to where they were needed throughout the world in World War II. They served in every theater of operations in distant and dangerous regions of the world.

By the later part of 1940, Britain was sustaining a staggering number of shipping losses; the German U-boats were sending tons of desperately needed supplies and hundreds of people to the bottom of the sea, neutral and Allied ships alike. They were sinking ships faster than the combined efforts of the British and Commonwealth shipyards could replace them, portending the defeat of Britain. American shipyards went into emergency shipbuilding mode early in 1943, and the merchant Liberty ships slid down the American yards in spades. The 2,710 Liberty ships were by all accounts the maritime workhorses of the Allies; they were the cargo ships that kept the Allied war effort going. The technical designation for the Liberty ship was the EC2, meaning that it was designed for “emergency construction” by the United States Maritime Commission. The popular name, the Liberty ship, recognized the ship’s role in liberating Europe. Two hundred and sixteen of these ships were sunk, and two thousand and eighty-five NAG were killed, a casualty rate rivaling that of any armed forces during World War II.

As a NAG commanding officer, Alonzo could not know what would happen to the ships he served on. But statistics showed that one in ten Liberty ships would be sunk or damaged. The statistics would show that many men would be wounded, taken prisoner, or killed in action. It has been well documented that the Japanese submarine crews routinely brutally stabbed, morbidly tortured,
and mercilessly beheaded survivors of Liberty ships that they had sunk by torpedo.

What Alonzo did know was that he and only he was responsible for twenty-seven young men who were not yet in their twenties. He and only he would be responsible for giving the order to fire the bow, stern, and machine guns. It was wartime, and as the Armed Guard commander, he had exclusive responsibility for the ship's defense. He drilled his gunners on firing, safety precautions, machine-gun stripping, launching life boats, and countless emergency procedures. He was responsible for voyage and personnel reports. The reports were in accordance with General Instructions for Commanding Officers of Naval Armed Guards on Merchant Ships. The reports were prepared and delivered at the completion of each voyage, and typically, they were three pages long, single-spaced and on legal-size paper. Topics covered by the report included the type of ship, the cargo being delivered, the port of departure, the port of destination, the speed of the ship, the number of ships in the convoy, the number of escort vessels and aircraft, any contacts and action with the enemy, any port problems, and deficiencies with his unit or the ship. In general, it was a resume of the voyage.

Alonzo was an accomplished writer as evidenced by his efforts as a sports editor in high school, a college writer, and the editor in chief of the Peabody Law Review. The following sample of his daily ship log is yet another example of his capable hand:

Contacts and action with the enemy:
The only indication of any contact with the enemy was the action of one escort vessel, 2000 yards off the port beam of this vessel, in dropping 3 depth charges at 1105, 21 September, 1944. This procedure was followed by dropping 5 depth charges at 1120 on said date. Prior to and during the action of dropping depth charges escort vessel hoisted black pennant indicating that under-water sound equipment was being used.
Daily routine this voyage has included instruction by Armed Guard Commander as regards all armament, which information has been followed by drills. Vessels of convoy and friendly aircraft have been employed as simulated targets. Principles of aim-off and tracer control have been taught on several occasions. Each man has received instruction concerning all armament in addition to being drilled rigidly on his own positions. Small arms instruction has been repeated for entire crew prior to commencement of every port watch. Aircraft, and torpedo-boat, and submarine identification lectures have been given on several occasions.

Alonzo took part in convoy conferences (to adjust maneuvers while under attack from enemy torpedoes and air strikes), set duty schedules, provided positive reinforcement, dealt discipline, applied pressure bandages, splinted broken limbs, and administered general first-aid when a seaman was injured. His steamer trunk medicine chest held items from aspirin to morphine, and catgut to splints; he would be expected to stitch his sailors and save their lives. When his boys were in port, dispensing condoms proved to be mindful medicine! His men called him “the old man,” as he was twenty-eight and they were seventeen and eighteen, sometimes as young as fifteen! His youthful crew had familiar ship names: Guns for the gunners, Flags for the signalmen, and Sparks for the radio operators. Yes, Alonzo, too, had many crew-given names, many of which he would never know!

What Alonzo did know was that the ship on which he was afloat was 441 feet long, measured 56 feet wide, and lumbered along at 11 knots (12.6 miles per hour). A 2,500-horsepower steam engine propelled her forward as she took her place in the convoy. Safety was the convoy’s job. Each ship had its designated place, destination, route, and special signals and tactics while in the
column formation; convoys could be made up of over 120 ships. The Liberty could carry over nine thousand tons of cargo—for example, 2,840 jeeps, 440 tanks, or 230 million rounds of rifle ammunition. Each Liberty was fitted for war with a three-inch bow gun, two 37 mm bow guns, six to eight 20 mm machine guns, and a four- or five-inch stern gun. Because Liberty ships were built in large sections that were welded, and not riveted, together, they were considered dispensable and thought to have a shelf life of five years at the outside.

Welding the sections was a risky business, and some of the ships did, in fact, break apart while at the mercy of the punishing high sea with its relentless pounding, rolling, and heaving. The Liberty had been called an ugly duckling and a sea cow. As an ugly duckling, she had an ugly job to do. By day and night, she would run with her portholes painted black, with blackout curtains in place. She ran completely blacked out. She had an official name, but even though her namesake had been someone of import, she could not wear it on her bough. She had to hide under the gray paint of war; military security was veiled in secrecy, she had to remain invisible.

During World War II, Alonzo was the NAG commanding officer aboard three Liberty ships. Alonzo’s first assigned ship was the U.S. merchant ship SS (which stood for “steam ship”) Hannis Taylor. He was on that ship from December 28, 1943, to January 15, 1944. The Hannis Taylor was Liberty proud; she had been assembled by the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company in Wilmington. She was a War Shipping Administration Transport and could hold 550 troops. Her hull number was 1978. Her namesake was an Alabamian by the name of Mr. Hannis Taylor (1851–1922) who not only was a renowned jurist, but also had the distinct honor of being appointed by President Grover Cleveland as the nation’s first ambassador to Spain from 1893 to 1897. The ship was built in 1943 and scrapped in 1972.
Alonzo’s second assignment was aboard SS Silvester Gardiner. He was in command on the SS Silvester Gardiner from March 22, 1944, to January 30, 1945; it was nine months and eight days of war-weary water work. How serendipitous it was that a young ensign from Maine would be aboard a Maine-made Liberty ship. Of that, Alonzo was proud! In June 1943, the dry dock was flooded and the SS Silvester Gardiner floated out of the east yard of the New England Shipbuilding’s Cushing Point location in South Portland, Maine. She was the fifty-eighth ship built in Basin 3 of the east yard, and she proudly carried the hull number of 795.

In 1947 she was sold to a private concern and sadly scrapped in 1968. She was named for Dr. Silvester Gardiner (1708–1786). He was a physician who promoted inoculations for small pox, sold pharmaceuticals, and developed some one hundred thousand acres along the Kennebec River; the city of Gardiner bears his name. During the Revolutionary War, he was a Loyalist who fled to Halifax, Nova Scotia, then to Peel, England. In 1778, his name was listed in the Massachusetts Banishment Act. His landholdings were confiscated, and his personal belongings were sold at auction. A legal loophole left the Maine acreage to his heirs. How ironic that a Tory’s name was given to a United States Liberty ship. How striking that Alonzo would spend the greater part of his war effort on board this South Portland ship.

As 1945 began and the war waged on, Alonzo was detached from duty on the SS Silvester Gardiner and was reassigned to the SS Deborah Gannett one year and four days after she slid down the launching platform in Baltimore, Maryland. This would prove to be Alonzo’s last assignment aboard a beautiful “ugly duckling.” His duty would commence March 14 and end August 8. The Saratogian (New York) newspaper aptly wrote of this ship on April 10, 1944: “Frank Gannett’s daughter, Sally, christens the S.S. Deborah Gannett, 320th Liberty ship to be launched at the Bethlehem Fairfield shipyard, Baltimore, Md. The ship was
named for Deborah Sampson Gannett, a young Massachusetts girl who, at the age of twenty enlisted in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment under the name of Robert Shurtleff and fought in the Revolutionary War for two years. She was wounded and her true identity was disclosed. Miss Gannet and her father are descendants of the woman warrior.” As it turned out, Deborah Gannett had to petition the Massachusetts State Legislature for pay, which the army had withheld because she was woman. On October 25, 1783, the court awarded her thirty-four pounds plus interest. The Deborah Gannett was scrapped in 1962. Alonzo died the same year.

Alonzo was called a “ninety-day wonder.” His training was basic, intense, and rapid. He was chosen to command because he demonstrated good judgment, leadership skills, and coolness...
under fire. Alonzo immediately learned that it would be his time at sea that would be his real education. Upon his first arrival at the port director’s office, Lonnie was given the *Instructions for the Commanding Officer of Naval Armed Guard Crews Aboard Merchant Ships in Time of War* to guide him in his command. His instructions read, “There shall be no surrender and no abandoning ship, so long as the guns can be fought...The Navy Department considers that as long as there remains a chance to save the ship, The Armed Guard shall remain thereon and take every opportunity that may present itself to destroy the submarine.” The short version: Stay at the guns until the last shot is fired. “Go down with the ship” was unspoken but was well understood. Each and every time Alonzo boarded a new ship, his fellow officer handed him sidearms and gave testament that the ship was “shipshape.” Each time he heard the same standard question: “Do you relieve me?” Alonzo’s answer, “I do.”

Getting underway was always the same. The loading booms groaned under the strain of the immense weight of lading supplies being stowed, stored, and stacked in the five large holds. The types of cargo, as catalogued in many of Alonzo’s “Reports of Voyage,” included ammunition, steel, iron, sulfuric acid, nitric acid, sugar, sulfur dioxide, phosphorus, tires, assorted foodstuffs, steel rails, armament, airplanes and airplane parts, cotton, tanks, trucks, mail, steel wire, pig iron, sheet steel, bombs, fuses, vehicles, and soldiers’ personal property. The ships were tinderboxes, potential explosions waiting to be enkindled and burst into flames. Two hundred and sixteen Liberties were lost to enemy action, weather, and accidents. None of these losses were commanded by Alonzo. During the war, the convoy awaited and the ships were weighted to the brim and beyond. As the Liberty rode low in the water in its assigned convoy position, the daunting terrible trip was on! The ship logbooks reveal that during this time, Alonzo’s sea scow was in and around important military combat engagements. His
ship unloaded needed supplies in the ports in England, Scotland, Belgium, France, Italy, Sicily, and Algeria.

The mission of the Armed Guard was to defend the ship from enemy air, surface, and submarine attacks. The crew manned and maintained guns, and stood watch. The running of the ship was done by the merchant seamen. When the weather was bad and while under enemy attacks, the Armed Guard sailor had the most dangerous job in the United States Navy in the early part of the war. At anchor and when alongside in port, they stood anti-sabotage watch; in the Mediterranean frogmen regularly attempted to attach bombs to the Liberty’s hull. As the officer in charge of his unit, Alonzo was not directly responsible to the ship’s captain. He was a military commander on a nonmilitary ship. In effect, there were two commands of the merchant ship—the merchant marine crew and the Navy crew. The Captain, or Master, was responsible for the navigation and safety of his ship, but in wartime the Armed Guard commander had exclusive responsibility for the ship’s defense, a point of contention for some captains. The merchant seamen and Navy sailors had separate sleeping quarters, washrooms, and mess halls. This dichotomy of command is rarely a good thing, especially in the restricted confines of a ship. Alonzo had to be a tactful person who would look after his men and at the same time keep relations smooth between the two groups. The working relationship between Armed Guard and merchant crews on sundry ships left a lot to be desired; on Alonzo’s ships, quite the opposite. His unique ability to bring people together, his good nature (one the reasons for which Ruperta married him), his attention to detail, his calm demeanor, and his respect for others were undeniable.

In his “Report of Voyage” on May 19, 1944, Alonzo had this to say about the entire crew: “The Master and Officers of the ship observed and executed ‘Wartime Instructions For United States Vessels’ in strict conformity with all regulations. Particularly
pleasing was their action of following prescribed rules for fire and boat drills. Full cooperation was extended to Armed Guard Commander by the Master, J.R. Lewis, and, the action of the merchant crew in following requests of Armed Guard Commander at battle stations and, in military matters in general, left little to be desired.”

In general, the merchant seamen were better paid than the naval men on the same ship. Many misconceptions, possibly based on not having the full facts, added fuel to the fire. Yet, when the ship fell under attack, the mariners assisted the sailors by passing ammunition. When sailors fell wounded or killed, the mariners stepped in to fire the weapons. The fact remained—the ship's captain and the Armed Guard officer who acted with common sense facilitated a positive working relationship and a well-run dually commanded cargo warship.

Alonzo's sailors were under great mental strain. He was their doctor and chaplain, their confidant and commander. While at sea, Alonzo's commanding officer, Wm. J. Coakley, in his “Report on the Fitness of Officers,” stated: “Ensign Conant is an officer of good personal and military character. He performed his duties as commander of naval gun crews on armed merchant vessels in a good manner. This officer is recommended for promotion to the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade) when officers of similar length of service are promoted, and is recommended as suitable material for eventual appointment to permanent commissioned rank in the regular Navy.”

In addition, Commander Coakley stated that he would “be pleased to have him” under his command. On December 1, 1944, Alonzo was promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade, just under a year and a half from the day he entered the Naval Reserves in Portland, Maine.

During the five months the war was playing out toward its inevitable end, Alonzo wrote the following letter to his
JUDGE ALONZO CONANT (1914–1962)

Alonzo and Ruperta Conant with their first child, Sue Turner Conant. This 1944 photograph was taken in front of the home of Myron Turner, Ruperta’s father, in Vassalboro, Maine. At the time, Alonzo was on leave from his naval duties.

nineteen-month-old daughter, Sue, from “somewhere in France.”

The letter was dated June 27, 1945:

My Dearest Sue,

Please excuse your Dad for being a little tardy in thanking you for that exquisite Father’s Day card. Even though I’ve seen very little of you during these past nineteen months, your Mother has written so much to me concerning you that I feel almost as though I was seeing you regularly. As soon as the war is finished I promise you that you will get to know your Dad very well.

Your Mother and I have great plans for you, Sue. We will see to it that you have ample opportunities to develop both
your mind and body. Your teachers will be competent even if your Dad has to be selected to the school board and as soon as you are inclined, you will be afforded instruction in swimming or golf—or whatever athletics you desire. After you have acquired poise, resulting from mental and physical coordination, have found humility; and have developed and expressed a desire to advance the worth-while things in life, the world will be a little better for your having been a citizen.

Be a good girl, Sue, and try to follow your Mother’s suggestions.

Love,
Dad

As Alonzo was in the last months of commanding the NAG aboard the Liberty ships, Mussolini was killed at Lake Como, Italy, Hitler committed suicide in Berlin, and Germany surrendered. Admiral Dönitz assumed command in Germany, and V-E Day was declared on May 8, thus marking the end of World War II in Europe. The victory coincided with the sixty-first birthday of President Harry Truman. The Allied demand for an unconditional surrender was made, and Japan refused to surrender. On August 6, the *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally.

On August 8, 1945, Alonzo’s naval orders officially detached him from duty as Commanding Officer Armed Guard Unit on board the *SS Deborah Gannett*. Subsequently, he was ordered to the Command Third Naval legal office building in New York City for temporary duty as a legal officer. Sequentially, Alonzo was detached from duty afloat at the Naval Receiving Station and Armed Guard Center, Brooklyn, and reassigned to the Commandant, First Naval District, Boston, Massachusetts. He was once again assigned as a legal officer. From there, he was assigned for duty as the relief officer for the standing lieutenant at the U.S. Naval Station, Portland, Maine.
Discussions with Alonzo revealed that the Navy and more specifically, the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG), which is the legal arm of the United States Navy, was eager to employ him on a full-time basis. His first time in the most national of national arenas, World War II, proved to the Navy that he was exceptional; they wanted him. Alonzo considered the offer seriously and with great regard; he loved law, equal justice, and honest advocacy therein. However, doing so would mean that he and his young family would have to move many times. For a hometown boy, leaving Maine was a difficult decision.

On January 18, 1946, Alonzo reported to the Separation Center in Boston, Massachusetts, whereby he was released from active duty. He was given one hundred dollars mustering-out money, counseled on his veterans rights and benefits, issued an Honorable Service lapel button, and granted a one-month leave with pay. Alonzo was advised that the Chief of Naval Personnel determined that his separation from active naval service was under honorable conditions and that he would receive a Certificate of Satisfactory Service.

Alonzo left active duty, declined a full-time Naval JAG career, and remained in the Naval Reserves. A decisive end to the most destructive war in history brought Alonzo home to his young family and to the home he loved. Alonzo, like so many of his generation, did his duty, and he made a difference.
After Alonzo Conant died, his family received this certificate acknowledging Conant’s service in the Armed Forces of the United States. This acknowledgment is signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson.
AS PEACE FINALLY CAME IN AUGUST 1945, MAINERS WERE relieved to see the end of a long war. Eighty thousand Mainers served in the war; 1,634 did not return. The war had provided jobs for the unemployed and upraised the country out of the Great Depression. Financially, America was back on its feet, the economy was booming, a new consumer-based society had emerged, and the future promised prosperity. The greater part of Maine followed suit, albeit with pockets of antiquated and out-of-repair infrastructure that was still reminiscent of the nineteenth century.

Politically, Maine was, for all intents and purposes, a one-party political system—Republican. However, Governor Horace Hildreth, along with many other Republicans, was out of touch with Maine’s growing middle class. The party was starting to lose their grip on Maine’s politics, in part because they did not recognize the power of the labor unions in the new economy. The Democratic Party with its progressive philosophy would prove to more aptly fit the post-war landscape. Maine was in preparation for a political permutation, portending changes that would directly impact Alonzo’s future professional and family life.

For Alonzo, February 1946 found him back in his hometown of Auburn, reunited with his loved ones. The home at 650 Center Street was filled anew with both old and new life. Alonzo, his
mother, his wife, and his daughter all happily reunited under one roof. All were ready to build on what had been and eager to look forward to what would come to be. Their lives had been changed forever by war. As they looked to a bright future, Ruperta’s professional life would turn to home life. She would manage the house, care for her mother-in-law, raise her daughter, and keep the home fires burning, literally and figuratively. She cooked, cleaned, paid the bills, and shook the coal down to warm the home. She was a force to be reckoned with!

Alonzo never looked back at his decision to decline a naval career. He had found the legal questions and cases interesting and challenging while he was a naval legal officer. Nevertheless, he had desired, like so many of his fellow veterans, to go home. His affection for his hometown was certain and undeniable. Alonzo was coming back from the war as an experienced naval officer and a seasoned lawyer. He owned a home and had a job awaiting him; but for thousands of others, they had neither a job nor a home to return to.

Thanks to the GI bill, getting affordable mortgages for homes and a needed education were realities for returning veterans. Going from wartime to peacetime called for government stimulus. It was needed, and it worked. Many Maine farm boys who went to college never returned to the farm, and others used the bill to go to agricultural colleges to gain the new farming technologies in order to stay on their family farms. The post World War II boon was on. Babies were being born, and factories were retooled to produce toasters and washing machines instead of guns. Returning soldiers started to have families and purchase new houses.

At thirty-two years of age, Alonzo returned home from active service duty and resumed his job as the Director of Enforcement for the Maine State Liquor Commission. He had occupied that post since October 9, 1941, and he had been given a leave of absence during the three years of military service. All the while
Alonzo was stabilizing his work responsibilities, his family was establishing new schedules, experiencing both trepidation and hopefulness regarding the changes at hand.

A few months after Alonzo had resumed his duties in Augusta, he received a telephone call from the office of Governor Horace A. Hildreth. Governor Hildreth, a Gardiner native son, Bowdoin and Harvard graduate, had known and worked with Alonzo in 1941 during the Ninetieth Legislative session of the Maine House of Representatives. Governor Hildreth’s respect for Alonzo’s irrefutable qualifications precipitated his nomination of Alonzo to fill a four-year term in the Auburn Municipal Court. Alonzo accepted the nomination without hesitation. Adjudication of cases would be a good fit for him, and a chance to work close to home without the long commute to Augusta every day would be welcomed.

The nomination was highlighted in an article in the Lewiston Daily Sun dated October 31, 1946, entitled “[Governor] Nominates Alonzo Conant for Auburn Municipal Court Judge.” Hildreth had been elected governor in 1944 and again in 1946 by large numbers (until 1963 the governorship term had been a two-year term). Following the war, he opened a turnpike roadway and made highway history for Maine by constructing the first superhighway to use asphalt over concrete; it was open for business just two years after construction started. Highway engineers from around the world came to Maine to inspect and admire the new surface; Hildreth had effected change in a historically innovative way. That turnpike roadway, known as the Maine Turnpike and Interstate 95, would prove to play a very important role in Alonzo’s future.

Alonzo’s judgeship nomination was easily confirmed by the governor and his five-member executive council. With his appointment set in place, Alonzo resigned his role with the Maine Liquor Commission on November 18, 1946. The very next day, as described in The Lewiston Daily Sun, Alonzo proudly took the oath
of office in a formal ceremony located in the Auburn courthouse. Alonzo’s career in the judicial system had begun.

Before the war, 1941–43, Alonzo Conant was Director of Enforcement and prosecuting counsel for the Maine State Liquor Commission. Upon returning from the war, Alonzo was appointed Auburn’s Municipal Court Judge. He held this position for twelve years (three terms) and was appointed by three different governors.
The Judge

Historically, Auburn’s municipal court evolved from trial justices. In 1875, through an act of legislature, the newly created municipal court went into effect. In 1891, the legislature increased the jurisdiction of the municipal court, made it a court of record, and provided it with a clerk. A further provision of the Auburn charter required the city to “provide a suitable court room, conveniently situated and appropriately fitted up and furnished, in which to hold said court.” The “said court” was the Androscoggin County Courthouse. The courthouse building sat on the corner of Turner and Court streets. It was a large brick Renaissance revival complex that was designed by Gridley Fox Bryant in 1857. Completing the complex and sitting just in front of the courthouse was the Civil War Monument. The Hallowell granite soldier statue was designed by Italian artisans and erected in 1882. Its engraving reads: “In Memory of Her Noble Sons/Who On Land and Sea/Gave Their Lives/To Preserve The Union/And Secure Freedom/To All Its People.” Alonzo presided over that court for twelve consecutive years. For twelve years, each morning, he walked across the street from his law office, entered the courthouse, donned his black robe, and began the day. He held a deep affection for being a judge.

Alonzo was sworn into his new office by James Everett Philoon, the clerk of the Androscoggin Superior Court. He would swear Alonzo in for three consecutive judicial appointments (1946–1958). Philoon was twenty-six years Alonzo’s senior, a 1913 graduate of Bowdoin, a 1918 baccalaureate law graduate of Boston University, and a 1934 Androscoggin clerk of courts appointee. He was president of the Androscoggin Historical Society, custodian in charge of historical collections, the author of numerous newspaper articles and several books, and a trustee of the Elm Street Universalist Perish. The two men were friends, and would become business and community collaborators.

Alonzo and James were fellow Kiwanians. In 1947, they would partner a law office at 108 Court Street, just across the 83
street from the courthouse, and they would share fiduciary duties for the Universalist church. In addition to his growing law practice, Alonzo’s family grew by one. On January 7 of the same year, Alonzo’s second daughter, Ellen Amelia Conant, was born at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston.

Upon returning home from war, Alonzo Conant Jr. reopened his law practice in Auburn. His office was on Turner Street in the National Shoe and Leather Bank Building, downtown Auburn (above). His office was located on the right side of the second floor. This building was just across the street from the Androscoggin County Court Building (below), where he served as Municipal Court Judge, 1946–1958.
With an expanding law practice, Alonzo and James needed a colleague to manage and run the office. That person was Thelma White. She was organized, detailed orientated, and had extensive legal experience. Thelma had worked for Philoon, and she eagerly joined the new law office. Steeped in the art of shorthand, a Christian Scientist, and unmarried, she was unsurpassed in her legal literacy. Both James and Alonzo readily acknowledged that their office would not have functioned without her competence and skill. After James retired, she would manage Alonzo’s office until his death.

It would be Thelma who mentored Alonzo’s daughters in the ABC’s of legalese. As young girls, there were many days when Sue and Ellen would go to their father’s office after school. There, Thelma joyfully assigned them their own desks, pencils, and paper. Each girl would then be given appropriate, fun, and educational typing exercises. Long after Thelma’s passing, both girls recounted the safe, warm, and enjoyable time spent with Thelma. They remember the zinging sound of the black paper roller spinning as they plucked the paper from the machine just for fun. What a noise that made! They remembered the *plink, plink, plink* sound of the pearl “D” shaped keys as they struck the white linen paper, and the *click, click* sound of the space bar as the carriage of the gray “Loyal Royal” typewriter advanced. They remembered when *plink* changed to *thud* as the magic margin-right brought the forward movement of the carriage to a full stop. The excitement of hearing the bell and pushing the carriage lever back meant that the next line magically appeared. Oh, the joys of learning to type!

The girls helped Thelma organize and prioritize stacks of papers in an orderly fashion. Alonzo’s office was, generally speaking, a bit askew and off-limits. However, it was only Sue who was allowed the tall task of tidying her dad’s massive mahogany desk, which was always piled high with papers. Even at a young age, she was orderly. The girls admired Thelma’s kind and quiet manner and
reveled in her warm words of encouragement. Both girls imagined the time that they would run Alonzo’s office in the same organized and thoughtful manner.

The Conants raised two daughters, Sue Turner (left) and Ellen Amelia (right). A third child, Scott, died at birth in 1958. The Conant sisters are wearing matching Easter outfits, designed and hand-made by their mother, Ruperta.

Both girls dreamed of the day that they would assist their dad and further that they, too, would become lawyers. Alonzo’s door would read “Alonzo Conant and Daughters, Attorneys at Law.” The Conant girls were told that they could be anything and do anything
that they so desired, and that they had the opportunity and intelligence to do so. Alonzo did apprise the girls that being a woman in a man's world was difficult. Moreover, he told them, a woman lawyer would be treated unfairly and with discrimination, but that if they had the dream to be a lawyer, then they should fight to do so. In point of fact, the woman's right to vote was granted a mere twenty-three years before Sue's birth. In reality, he told the girls, women were equally able as men. Alonzo believed in equal pay for men and women; he believed in equal rights for all. These lessons the girls learned from their father would stay with them forever.

Both James and Thelma died in 1970, eight years after Alonzo's passing. As they lived, and as they died, they held Judge Conant in high regard both personally and professionally, and he them. Philoon was one of four designated signees on permanent record of the Kiwanis Club of Auburn-Lewiston's Resolution of Respect, stating that they “deeply regretted the passing of Alonzo, whose life exemplified the ideals which motivate our highest endeavors. He stood for cheerful service to others, both in his private actions and through public responsibility.”

Alonzo's judgeship, as well as his law practice, was a part-time job. This meant that his daily schedule had many layers. Early morning found Alonzo in his law office, mid-morning found him in court, and late afternoon found him back at the office. Alonzo had to piece together a living wage to support his young and expanding family. In a 1947 Navy report, Alonzo summarized his judicial duties and responsibilities: “Original jurisdiction over all misdemeanors in Androscoggin County; original jurisdiction of civil causes under $300. Binding over jurisdiction over felonies; Auburn Municipal Court is fourth largest in State of Maine. Function of court also includes disposition of all juvenile cases.”

The charter that established the Auburn municipal court in 1875 spoke to the “time of holding court” as “at ten o'clock in the forenoon, at such suitable place within the city of Auburn as said
city shall provide.” The Maine statutes are silent with respect to the reason for the court’s hours. Conjecture implies that it may have been left to the judge’s discretion, based on caseload. Alonzo’s court convened at ten o’clock in the morning and adjourned at two o’clock in the afternoon. It is of interest to note that in a 2014 interview with Sue and Ellen, Irving Isaacson, the judge who replaced Alonzo in 1958, revealed his opinion regarding the court hours. “The hours of court of ten to two was a waste of the day. I had to make a living, you know!” He had the hours amended to 8:00 a.m. to noon.

For Alonzo, 2:00 p.m. was only off the clock in a figurative sense. He was paid for part-time work, yet in reality, he worked what you and I would consider full-time plus. At the court adjournment hour, the adjudicated cases only ceased in the sense that the doors of the court were closed. As the cases amassed an aggregate amount of administrative filings, Alonzo spent the contiguous time clearing his cases in conjunction with preparation for the subsequent day’s cases.

The fact that Alonzo’s judgeship was part-time logically begs the question of pay. As revealed in Private & Special Laws of the Maine Constitution, the salaries of the judge and/or clerks of Auburn Municipal Court are spelled out. Alonzo’s annual pay, paid to him monthly by the City of Auburn, began in 1947 as $2,100. In 1957, his last year in this job, he was paid $3,050. It seems inexplicable that in Alonzo’s tenure and time in history, a judgeship job with such great import was part-time! Yet, it was. It is of note that his job as Director of Enforcement for the Liquor Commission paid him more money than his judgeship; for many lawyers, a judgeship nomination, if accepted, meant a pay cut.

In The Lewiston Daily Sun of November 20, 1946, an article entitled “Judge Conant Hears Several Cases in First Day on Bench” gave a sneak peek into the daily cases seen by Alonzo’s municipal courtroom. Offenses included simple assault and battery, petty
The Judge

Theft, disturbing the peace, public nuisances, various traffic violations, public drunkenness, driving drunk, and some other crimes. Specifically, crimes that could be charged either as a felony or a misdemeanor—depending on the circumstances and the discretion of the district attorney—were under the jurisdiction of Alonzo's court. Those crimes were punishable by fines, jail, or both. Alonzo's municipal court was the fourth largest in the state of Maine.

Alonzo heard civil cases "under three hundred dollars." They would be cases of personal injury or tort law, such as transportation accidents, defective drugs, product liability, medical malpractice, and breach of contract. Domestic issues, such as divorce, child custody, and division of marital property were also on Alonzo's daily court docket.

Juvenile cases were the bulk of Alonzo's work, and they were deeply important to him. His care of and attention to the juvenile cases was well known throughout the state. The following proclamation in the Resolution of Respect from the Knights of Pythias, dated January 4, 1962, underscores Alonzo's strength of commitment to juvenile justice: "As Judge of Auburn Municipal Court, by his fairness and keen understanding, he was considered one of the best judges on juvenile cases in the state, and that his aim and purpose has ever been the elevation, the happiness, the betterment of mankind."

As reported in the Portland Press Herald on November 20, 1949, "Alonzo Conant of Auburn, Elected as Juvenile Delinquency Committee Chairman, Maine Municipal Court Judges." His peer-appointed chairmanship was affidavit that his colleagues put him in a position of professional trust; he had demonstrated a highly rated standard of ethical principles and an extraordinary grasp and implementation of juvenile delinquency law.

In 1899, the first juvenile court in this country was established in Cook County, Illinois. By 1910, thirty-two states had established juvenile courts and/or probation services. By 1925,
forty-six states had followed that example. Instead of merely punishing delinquents for their crimes, the juvenile courts sought to rehabilitate delinquents through treatment. The result of medical and psychological treatment would facilitate the youth's probability of becoming a healthy, positive, and productive citizen. The focus was on rehabilitation, not punishment. Thus, a compassionate mission to help children in trouble was the premise of the laws that established juvenile courts. It made the juvenile and criminal justice systems procedurally and substantively different.

For the next half a century, the majority of juvenile courts had exclusive jurisdiction over all youth under age eighteen who were charged with criminal violations. The juvenile court intake was given the right to consider extra-legal as well as legal factors in deciding how to handle the cases. Bypassing judicial action with informal handling of cases was also at the court's discretion. The procedural dealings were specifically targeted for fair treatment of juvenile offenders. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, the ability of the juvenile court to succeed in rehabilitating delinquent youth was brought into question. The basic philosophy of rehabilitation through individualized justice was not in question, but the indefinite institutionalization of juveniles as treatment was being questioned.

Judge Conant had a robust record of public speaking, which extended his reach well beyond his courtroom. He regularly spoke to local groups for the express purpose of educating the citizenry and the media regarding community topics of immediate and future concerns. For instance, during the 1950s, he spoke to the Bates College Law Club on "Court Procedures for Juvenile Cases," to the Lewiston-Auburn College Women's Club on "Court Dispensation of Juvenile Delinquency Cases," and to the first session of the 1955 University of Life for Youth Group on "Delinquency."

It was Judge Conant's belief that immediate incarceration as a first step was severe, unkind, and detrimental to rehabilitation. His progressive attitude recognized the premise that the cause of
juvenile delinquency was in part the lack of available opportunities for youth of a lower socioeconomic status. He believed that societal responsibility to its youth who were in violation of law, due to this deficit, must be thoughtful and in good faith with a restorative objective. In addition, he believed that community-based councils and programs were the preferred models for delinquency prevention.

In an article called “Judge Elaborates On Court Procedures for Juvenile Cases” in The Bates Student, dated November 16, 1955, Alonzo addressed his alma mater’s Barristers (the student law club) to spell out how the Maine court system affects juveniles. Judge Conant began his talk by explaining the following: In the state of Maine, those under seventeen years of age are considered juveniles. The municipal court handles cases of all juvenile delinquents except those charged with homicides and some types of robbery, which are under the jurisdiction of the higher courts.

Judge Conant outlined the courtroom procedures, first noting that the courtroom was closed to all outsiders. Second, parents or guardians had to accompany the accused youth. Conant stressed that, “The burden is on the State all of the time, the presumption of innocence until found guilty was law.” Next, the juvenile was read the alleged crime “sentence by sentence” and asked if he or she understood the accusation. The respondent was advised of all of his or her rights, and the parents or guardians were advised of their right to hire a lawyer if they so desired. Conant went on to describe how the Probation Department, the Department of Health and Welfare, and the state psychiatrist were routinely consulted. The three entities assessed the situation and recommended the best practice for rehabilitation. In most cases, delinquents were sent to state reform schools and a few to foster homes. Conant went on to stress that upon release from the schools or foster homes, as much as possible was done to rehabilitate the juveniles in their home areas.
In his concluding remarks, Judge Conant highlighted the need for a Youth Authority. The Youth Authority, already in place in some states at that time, was an official licensed commission that included doctors, psychiatrists, and court attachés who were responsible to examine youth and determine their needs in rehabilitation. As an official state commission, accountability and transparency would be insured, with oversight in place, as the youth was assessed. Always a trailblazer, Judge Conant actively supported and promoted such a commission; however, Judge Conant did not live long enough to see a commission enacted.

An article in the *Lewiston Evening Journal* on December 8, 1951, called “Busy Juvenile Session in Auburn Court; Six Face Variety of Charges” appropriately described Judge Conant’s honest and just approach regarding the young offenders. In most cases, he suspended a state reform school sentence. In its place, he granted a probationary sentence with a scheduled court date to revisit any and all concerns.

In one case in point, he pronounced the sentence and remarked, “If you boys don’t behave while you are on probation, I’ll bring you back here so fast it will make your heads swim.” In a second case, Judge Conant was told by police matron Mrs. Nelida Whitmore that she and Miss Shirley Davis, city health officer, had visited the home of the young boy in question and had found the home in a deplorable state. In a previous court appearance, the same family had been asked to move to the outskirts of the city to give the children, five of them, a better chance. Judge Conant admonished the parents on the one hand, and then spent time educating them in a positive manner. He gave a suspended sentence to the youth coupled with supervised probation.

Alonzo truly had a remarkable ability to apply the law to facts and to understand the real effects of a judicial decision. This coupled with his calm and courteous willingness to listen and consider all sides made him an extremely wise presence on the
bench. In a letter to Mrs. Conant after Alonzo's death, Tom Day, Alonzo's court recorder for over ten years and pallbearer at his funeral, underscored Judge Conant's wisdom: "Lon and I worked together very closely over ten years, day after day, and as time went on I developed a great admiration for his understanding, kindness, patience, prudence, honesty, wisdom and sagacity. These are not just words to me because I can think of cases he handled that demonstrated the breadth of his character and the depth of his heart. We did not agree on every iota but I am eager to say that so many times his thinking on a matter would in the long run prove to be the wiser of the two."

Juvenile delinquency goes through periods of increase and decrease, yet it never abates altogether. Social agencies and governments manage periods of increased or decreased effort in dealing with delinquency, oscillating back and forth between repressive and less restrictive measures, illustrating the wax and wane of societal attitudes. At the close of the twentieth century, policymakers throughout the United States had greatly erased the border between juvenile delinquency and criminal justice. Young people who violate the law are no longer guaranteed special consideration from the legal system. In Judge Conant's day, he had the latitude to give special consideration to the young offenders who came before his bench. As he knew the obvious negative impact that juvenile delinquency had on the lives and community of Auburn, he often found a cost-effective way, both literally and figuratively, to rehabilitate and protect the youth. He had seen some of these lads before in another time and place; they had been his sailors in the Naval Armed Guard in World War II. Most were young men, uneducated, many from rural farm areas. Some had been in trouble with the law, and they all needed a second chance.

Judge Conant chose to place many of his young folks in the armed services rather than immediate incarceration. He knew firsthand what the rigors of the military offered. It would be on
January 6, 1962, at Plummer and Merrill Funeral Home on Turner Street in Auburn that a gentleman in his late twenties stood in the front of the long line of mourners, waiting for the doors to open. He was there to pay his respects to Judge Alonzo Conant. The man spoke to Mrs. Conant, his face saddened with grief, hers the mirror of his. She listened to his every intentional word. His voice wavered as he said, “Judge Conant saved my life and I never got to tell him.” The man recounted his troubled youth, his broken home, and his day in Judge Conant’s courtroom. How carefully and kindly the judge had treated him. He told Mrs. Conant of how the armed service educated him and gave him direction and hope. He recounted that he came home and got a good job. He wept as he spoke his words of praise for Judge Conant. This is one of many similar stories that were told that day, stories that exemplified Judge Conant’s depth of heart. Judge Conant’s legacy as “one of the best judges on juvenile cases in the state” was accurate.

Judge Conant’s reach into the community was deep and long. He kept in close touch with the service clubs and organizations of the city and beyond. A tireless speaker, he delivered and redelivered speeches to inform citizens concerning the work of the municipal court. He stressed the need of the community to know the legitimate functions and the general character of the court’s work. He realized that to know the law and abide by it meant that his community would be a safe place to live.

Many jurists toil in obscurity little appreciated for their work to preserve the rule of law; Judge Conant was not among them. Through the late 1940s and 1950s, the footprint of Judge Conant’s unique influence, not only in his local community but through the state, was archived in many Maine newspapers. One exclusive news story worthy of attention was reported in the Lewiston Evening Journal on May 3, 1956. Entitled “Photos in Court,” it held significance not only in Auburn, Maine, but on the national stage as well. It was a factual example of Conant’s distinct progressive attitudes. It read:
Today a news photographer from the Lewiston Journal took pictures at an Auburn Municipal Court session. This was with the permission of Judge Alonzo Conant.

The Judge allowed the news pictures if they could be taken in a manner that would not interfere with the proceedings of the court; that “dignity and the decorum” be maintained.

Development in photography in the last few years has made possible the taking of pictures “unobtrusively”—in natural light without flash bulbs and in such a way that generally, neither court, lawyers, principles in the action or spectators are aware of it.

U.S. Attorney General Brownell said last December, after a demonstration of unobtrusive picture taking in a courtroom scene—324 “snaps” were made—“it is the duty of the Bar to re-examine Canon 35 to see if it is based on current facts. At the time it was adopted it did take account of facts, but they have changed.”

Judge Conant was thinking in an enlightened and modern mood when he granted permission for pictures—and at the same time was protecting and preserving the dignity of the court.

The Canon 35 that Brownell was referring to was not a statute law but a rule of the American Bar Association. It prescribed, among other things, that the “taking of photographs in the courtroom during sessions of the court, or recesses between sessions, and the broadcasting or televising of court proceedings were calculated to detract from the essential dignity of the court...” It was adopted in 1937 by the American Bar Association in its Canons of Professional and Judicial Ethics. The impetus for this grew out of the 1934 Burno Hauptmann kidnapping and murder of the young son of Charles A. Lindbergh. Nearly seven hundred reporters and photographers descended on the New Jersey town of Flemington
with a barrage of flashbulbs and cameras, some smuggled into the courtroom. Photographers lost a place in court, and it took four decades for them to reclaim it. In 1978, the Conference of State Chief Justices voted forty-four to one to approve a resolution allowing the highest court of each state to set its own guidelines for radio, TV, and other photographic coverage. Cameras in the courtroom continue in controversy to this day. Emblematic here was the “enlightened and modern mood” by which Judge Conant came to his action. Other judges in his time refused to let photographers enter their courtrooms. Through the years, Judge Conant has garnered attention with his pioneering perspective, his knowledge of history and law, and most importantly, his fair and thoughtful decision-making.

The late 1940s, with a wife and two daughters, Alonzo’s home life was bustling. His appointment to the bench would be piggybacked to two terms, and his Republican party was looking to him for leadership. The Lewiston Daily Sun of March 31, 1950, shows Judge Conant being congratulated at the Portland GOP conclave after he was elected the Androscoggin County state committeeman. The 1952–53 Republican Roster records Alonzo Conant as a state committee member from Androscoggin County and the chairman of the executive committee.

As the presidential election of 1952 approached, President Harry Truman decided not to run for reelection. Just four years after the end of World War II on June 25, 1950, Truman had enlisted the United States to defend South Korea from the North Korean invasion. The unpopular, undeclared war looked to have no resolution. It would be Republican candidate General Dwight David Eisenhower, who was a World War II hero and supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, who dramatically promised, if elected, “I shall go to Korea.” His campaign pledge to end the Korean War boosted Eisenhower’s popularity, and he handily defeated Democratic candidate Adlai E. Stevenson.
Eisenhower did not come to Maine during the campaign; however, in 1952 he did send Senator Richard Nixon, his vice presidential nominee, and his wife Pat to make a four-day swing through the state. Judge Conant was an invited guest as Nixon spoke to a Republican gathering in Augusta, Maine. Alonzo recalled, “Those guys have been so many miles and are so tired, they don’t even know what state they are in!”

As a life-long Republican, Alonzo Conant met many of the national political figures who visited Maine. Alonzo Conant is shown here seated with Vice President Richard N. Nixon and his wife Pat.

As the 1952 election came and went, Alonzo delivered Androscoggin County’s Republican vote for Eisenhower with ease and aplomb. Maine supported the victory in kind. Maine’s total popular vote of 351,786 decoded to 232,343 Republican, 118,806
Democrat, and 637 other votes, giving Eisenhower fifty-five percent of the popular vote to Adlai E. Stevenson's forty-four percent.

General Dwight Eisenhower swept to a landslide victory with the largest number of popular votes ever recorded for a presidential candidate. His popularity among the American people as a military hero translated into a Republican victory, and Alonzo helped that happen.

The ensuing ten years would bring Judge Conant joy, sadness, defeat, disappointment, the loss of his mother, the loss of a son, the near loss of his wife, and his own tragic death.
Fresh off the November Eisenhower landslide, Alonzo felt buoyed as he looked to the future with his young family, and to the promise of his unfolding professional career. The reality of January of 1953, however, would begin two years of political disappointments.

As the office of Maine’s Attorney General (AG) was due to be selected, Alonzo’s fellow colleagues urged him to seek the appointment. The AG’s job was that of chief legal advisor and prosecutor for the state of Maine, and the appointee was selected by a secret ballot of state legislators at the beginning of each legislative session. The AG served a two-year term with the possibility of serving a maximum of four terms in office. The professional responsibilities of this position included representing Maine in civil actions, investigating and prosecuting homicides, advising district attorneys, appointing deputy and assistant attorneys, and providing written opinions on matters of law as requested by the governor or legislature. Alonzo’s experiences as a lawyer, judge, Liquor Commission Director, and Naval legal officer made the case of how well qualified and how well suited he would be for the office.

The three men competing for the AG office were Judge Alonzo Conant; Alexander A. LaFleur of Portland, the standing
JUDGE ALONZO CONANT (1914–1962)

AG; and Senator-elect Frank F. Harding of Rockland. On January 7, 1953, as the Ninety-Sixth Maine Legislature convened, the voting for AG began in earnest. When the dust settled, LaFleur was renominated with ninety-three votes. Judge Conant received thirty-three votes, and Frank F. Harding received thirty votes. (January 7, 1953; Lewiston Evening Journal). Two years later, as the position was again renominated, Alonzo did not pursue the position but Frank F. Harding, whom Alonzo had bested in 1953, was confirmed. Alonzo would never again pursue that office.

Early in 1954, the state newspapers were inundated with advertisements and announcements regarding the fall state elections. The governor’s race, among other races, was heating up. With the loss of AG behind him, Alonzo’s interest was piqued as the Androscoggin County Attorney’s position became available. Edward J. Beauchamp, Democrat, friend, neighbor, colleague, and the standing county attorney, was not seeking reelection.

The job was that of chief legal officer for Androscoggin County. It was an elected office and a two-year term. The county attorney prosecuted criminal cases that occurred within that county. Alonzo’s solid reputation in the legal and professional arena throughout the state and his community easily qualified him for the job. Despite the fact that Alonzo was a Republican in a Democratic county and the election would be tough, Ed called Alonzo and urged him to run.

An article in the January 21, 1954, issue of the Lewiston Evening Journal entitled “Judge Alonzo Conant Possible Candidate For County Attorney” went on to say that Alonzo Conant would be a “strong possibility” as a candidate. The journalist wrote: “The judge, who has maintained one of the state’s best courts since taking over in 1946, is being urged by friends, especially many of the county’s lawyers, to make an effort to win the job.” The article continued, “Judge Conant is one of Maine’s best known Republicans.” The support for his candidacy was strong, and upon
early assessment, his chances of winning seemed very encouraging. But good work and a good reputation were not always sufficient in the fickle game of politics. History was proof positive that it was the party with the momentum that would most likely be the victor.

Alonzo knew that getting the Lewiston vote would be critical in order for him to win. Lewiston was a working-class immigrant community where the Franco-Americans had found support in the Democratic Party and had made the city a major political stronghold for the Democrats.

As the 1952 Republican Party’s landslide came and went, the Democratic Party in Maine sought to inject life into the party. In those days, Democrats were a minority and to many, Democrat was a dirty word. In 1953, Ed Muskie, classmate of Alonzo at Bates; Frank Coffin, 1940 Bates graduate and architect of the state’s modern Democratic Party; and Don Nicoll, Colby College graduate and executive director of the party, set up permanent headquarters in Lewiston. Their triad would change political history in a once one-party Republican state.

The Democratic committee listened to the people of Maine. They developed a six-page questionnaire to ascertain the issues the people of Maine found most pressing, and sent it out to teachers, college professors, fisheries experts, politicians on both sides of the aisle, and, of course, the press. For all intents and purposes, this was a precursor of the current-day focus group. The Republican hierarchy, as it traditionally responded, chided the Democrats. They berated the Democrats for not only asking the general public what was on their mind, they rebuked the Democrats for thinking that their platform could actually go forward and that Ed Muskie could actually beat Burton Cross. But unquestionably, the Democrats were listening to the people. The people of Maine wanted a change.

A realist, Alonzo fully understood that he faced an uphill climb against his Democratic opponent, Gaston M. Dumais.
Dumais, a 1946 graduate from Suffolk Law School, had attended Auburn schools and served in World War II with the U.S. Coast Guard. His law practice was in Lewiston. Alonzo wanted to be the Androscoggin County Attorney. He felt that he was the man for the job, and so he took his case to the people of Androscoggin County.

Alonzo’s professional career explicitly described a man who was a legal technician, an expert in practical application, and a legal pragmatist. His goal was to make law work for the citizens of his community. The county attorney’s job was clear-cut in definition and scope. Thus, it was Alonzo’s hope that political party overtones would not muddy the waters. Alonzo’s primary emphasis in his campaign would highlight his numerous legal credentials. His campaign slogan appropriately declared, “Experience is Essential/Experienced TRIAL Lawyer/Vote For JUDGE CONANT for COUNTY ATTORNEY.” This slogan defined his candidacy, and was aired and printed throughout the campaign.

This postcard is from the 1954 election where Alonzo Conant ran for Androscoggin County Attorney. At the time, Auburn and Lewiston were dominated by Democrats. Running as a Republican, Conant won in his hometown of Auburn and eleven surrounding towns. Unfortunately, the race was lost in Lewiston.
Alonzo would enlist a well-known Democrat to introduce him to the local Lewiston electorate. The young man was William “Bill” Rocheleau, Jr. He was the son of Canadian immigrants who had come to Lewiston to work in the mills, he was well known, and he believed in Alonzo’s candidacy. The pair were an unlikely duo, but since Lewiston was about ninety percent Democrats, Alonzo would need all the help he could get. Alonzo was the strategist; Bill was the first-class foot soldier. Bill Rocheleau, Jr. proved to be the right fellow for the job.

As the fall election began to unfold, it was clear that any Republican funds from the federal and state levels would be allocated for the top of the ticket. No funds were offered to Alonzo. Always mindful of his family, Alonzo conferred with his wife, Ruperta, regarding the matter. Alonzo was not a man of means and thus using family funds for gambling, if you will, was not an easy decision. His family was young and growing. A “run for the roses” was far from a sure thing, and spending one thousand dollars when his yearly judgeship was $2,650 would be felt on multiple levels. But the family decision was made, and the race was on. As the yellow and red of the fall foliage filled the air, “the Conants three” (Alonzo, Sue, and Ellen) took to the campaign trail in their 1952 smoke-gray, four-door Pontiac sedan, which offered a dual range Hydramatic transmission. Alonzo sported a red plaid flat-front snapped ivy cap, snuggly situated; a wool Pendleton shirt, buttoned to the top; dress wool gabardine slacks (he never wore casual slacks); brown Bass soft leather shoes (extra-wide); and a Camel unfiltered cigarette (his forefinger was yellow with years of “the smoke”). Alonzo was the captain of his campaign ship.

His daughters, Sue, age ten, and Ellen, age seven, sat in the backseat (there were no seat belts in those days!). As a youngster, Sue had been plagued with childhood illnesses. By age ten, she was thriving and well. The girls were all bundled up in custom comfy clothes made by their mother: knitted wool gloves, sewn wool
coats, and wool slacks, perfectly fitted at the ankle to keep the cool fall winds at bay. (Ruperta made most of the girls’ clothes, turned Alonzo’s cuffs and collars, darned the wool, and even made blankets and leg wraps for their horses. Not only was she forward-thinking, independent, and educated, she was a self-taught designer and seamstress.) The girls were full of energy. Helping their dad was an exciting game of setting the signs on the sides of roads, waving at the neighbors and passing cars, giving their dad huge hugs, and consuming Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups as a yummy treat.

It was a great sight to see. Alonzo would stop the car; the girls would hop out, round the rear fender away from the road, and wait for Alonzo to raise the trunk. Once opened, the trunk revealed a sea of campaign signage. The cardboard signs were all stacked and loosely laid flat. They were black and white, stapled to wooden stakes, and boldly printed with Alonzo’s bywords: “Vote for Judge Conant for County Attorney.” While the trio drove over the local roads, the clunk, clunk of wood on wood filled the car. The cool air of the day was infused with the electricity of the job. The “wooden soldier” signs were strategically and methodically placed: Center Street, Court Street, and Turner Street, all visually prominent and appealing to the voters’ view. Later, the girls would recall the feelings of excitement as the campaign became a fun game. Unfortunately, the sting of political defeat was at hand. Alonzo’s daughters would learn the disappointment of their father’s rejection; they would also feel the pain of his loss. These two lessons they would never forget.

Suited for the battle, in a metaphorical sense, Alonzo’s “do-it-yourself” campaign was armed and ready. Alonzo’s savvy sense of running a successful House of Representatives campaign in 1940 would be challenged with new and different tactical tools. Fourteen years later, technologies, times, and methods had dramatically changed. A constant in Alonzo’s strategic approach was his use of proven campaign tools. With his laser-like bead on winning
the race, Alonzo would use radio, television (this was a new tool), public appearances (including at state fairs), face-to-face greetings on the street, newspapers, campaign signs, and mailings to get his message out.

Alonzo’s unique mailing stratagem targeted and was supported by local Democrats. His standard-size postcard was double-sided. The front side listed an expansive inventory of Alonzo’s accomplishments including his education, family, and professional associations. The back side of the postcard was separated with a place to insert the recipient’s name and address to the right. The left side held a personal note written by a Democratic supporter. The personal note detailed the writer’s reasons for backing Judge Conant’s candidacy. The handwritten signature was underscored with the words “Democrat for Conant.” The cards were sent to family, friends, and business associates and were affixed with two-cent stamps. This mailing model was narrowly targeted and specific in nature. Alonzo would need a substantial Democratic vote to win the election.

Alonzo’s self-directed campaign schedule was driven by his court and law practice calendars. Schedule permitting, Alonzo’s campaign trail covered a wide, winding, and bumpy terrain. He travelled alone and returned to his home and family every night. On September 8, 1954, a Lewiston Evening Journal reporter found Alonzo at the Maine State Fair. He was described as one of the distinguished guests at an invitation-only evening dinner compliments of Mr. John J. Bourisk, who was the president of the Maine State Fair organization. Other candidates attending the dinner were Governor Burton M. Cross, Senator Frederick G. Payne, and Congressman Charles P. Nelson.

By 1954, television coverage in Maine had grown rapidly. Stations were hitting the airwaves from Bangor, Portland, and Poland Spring. As the invitations to appear on TV began to pour in, Alonzo felt confident. Alonzo knew that television would
provide a perfect medium for his campaign. Alonzo was at ease in front of the cameras, had a calm and relatable manner, and spoke with clarity and common sense. Alonzo felt that if the voters could see and hear his message, they would vote for him.

The election continued to become competitive, and in the early days of September, running up to the thirteenth (Election Day), Alonzo had to put his money down hard. The following appeared in the lower right-hand side of the front page of the Lewiston Daily Sun on September 9 (four days before the vote):

ALONZO CONANT FOR COUNTY ATTORNEY (X) VOTE FOR THE MAN WHO WILL REPRESENT RIGHTS OF PUBLIC & ACCUSED QUALIFIED BY EXPERIENCE AND ABILITY LAW ENFORCEMENT IS NO BETTER THAN YOUR COUNTY ATTORNEY

- 15 Years Trial Lawyer
- Judge of Auburn Municipal Court Since 1946
- Overseas Veteran World War 2
- Member Maine House of Representatives 1940–1941
- Chairman, Committee on Juvenile Delinquency Maine Municipal Judges Association

Directly under the above add, Alonzo's political advertisement packed an additional punch:

SEE AND HEAR JUDGE ALONZO CONANT TONIGHT WLAM-TV AT 6:30

A man of great energy, Alonzo never got weary. He could easily multitask on many levels and never break a sweat. Determined to aggressively offer the voters his candidacy in earnest, Alonzo would continue to knock on doors and offer his credentials for the
voters’ consideration. He moved forward until the last moments of Election Day.

As Ed Muskie’s Democratic ticket touted the need for a two-party competition at the polls and promised that the Democratic Party’s proposed programs for Mainers would make their lives better, the campaign started to look like the momentum was shifting to the Democratic column. The excitement of the race was compared to the upsurge just before the Louis J. Brann upset victory of 1932. Brann’s win made him Maine’s first Democratic governor elected since 1914. As the momentum surged for the Democrats, the old-line Republicans failed to rebut the opposition’s case and continued to sit on their proverbial hands. It was becoming clear that an upset was forthcoming.

The perfect political storm partnered with the hurricane, Edna, to frame a photo-finish result. There would be jubilation for some, and disappointment for others. The front-page headline in the September 11 Lewiston Daily Sun (the Saturday issue before the Monday election) read: “HURRICANE SPEEDS TOWARD MAINE, NORTHEASTER WITH 50 MILE GALES LIKELY.” The hurricane would not stop the Democrat voters. Folks came out in earnest to vote for Ed Muskie. The history of the voting ballot for Democrats was clear—no splitting of the ballot! Democrats voted for the whole ticket of candidates, no questions asked. It was a perfect storm, and Alonzo felt it coming. He knew that as much as Democrats wanted to see him win, they would not split their vote. They would not vote for a Republican.

The aftermath of the high winds revealed that Muskie, the widely viewed underdog, beat the incumbent with fifty-four percent of the vote, ending the dominance of the Republican Party in Maine. The votes were in, and Alonzo felt the sting of defeat for the second time in two years; he had lost his bid to serve. The vote was 11,739 (47 percent) for Conant and 13,460 (53 percent) for Dumais. Alonzo lost the election by 1,721 votes (6.8 percent).
JUDGE ALONZO CONANT (1914–1962)

(September 14, 1954; *Lewiston Daily Sun*). Conant easily won in Auburn, Durham, Greene, Leeds, Livermore, Livermore Falls, Mechanic Falls, Minot, Poland, Turner (his birthplace), Wales, and Webster. As feared, Alonzo lost the election in the Democratic stronghold of Lewiston. Alonzo’s campaign was clean and well run, but the political tide had turned and he had lost.

After-election protocol began a few short hours after the results were in. Concession was dually imparted, thank-yous were gratefully given, bills were promptly paid, and campaign signage was removed from the roadsides. The voter rejection weighed heavily upon Alonzo’s heart. Always buoyant and clearheaded, Alonzo looked to the future.

Forty-four years after Alonzo’s 1954 election loss, Bill Rocheleau was interviewed by Stuart O’Brien (a student at Bates College) in reference to the 1954 election. Bill spoke fondly about Judge Conant. Regarding the hard-fought election and his admiration for Alonzo, Bill said: “He [Alonzo Conant] missed by nine hundred votes [actually 1,721]. That was unbelievable because in Lewiston, it used to be ninety percent Democrats, so a lot of Democrats had to vote for him.” Rocheleau went on to say:

So anyway, my compensation for that was that I was to study law in his office, and that’s what I did. But then eventually he came to me and says, look, you can, he was a decent man, you can continue, but why don’t you take your GI Bill and get your law degree. Made sense, so I went to BU. I went there for two years, or a year, and then University of Maine at Portland opened up, so I transferred there because, you know, that was quite a jog.

In 1965, three years after Alonzo’s death, Bill would run for and lose the election for Androscoggin County Attorney, and in 1966, Bill was elected mayor of Lewiston. Alonzo always
appreciated the great effort that Bill had put forth during his campaign; he loved Bill’s moxie. Bill was a trusted friend. Upon Alonzo’s death, Bill was one of Alonzo’s six pallbearers. Some months after his death, Ruperta sold Alonzo’s law practice to Bill.

Alonzo may have been denied at the ballot box, but it was not his style to lick his wounds. On November 7, 1954, Alonzo started a new term for his judgeship. As documented in the October 27, 1954, article in the _Lewiston Evening Journal_, “Judge Alonzo Conant of Auburn municipal court was sworn in for his third term...Judge Conant was first appointed in 1946 by Gov. Horace Hildreth and then again in 1950 by Gov. Frederick G. Payne.” Alonzo had been appointed by Governor Burton Cross a short time before he was defeated by Ed Muskie. Four years later, in 1958, Alonzo would cross paths again with Ed Muskie regarding the continuance of his judgeship appointment. The outcome would be poignantly political.

In addition to his judgeship, Alonzo was pursued and hired by the Maine Good Roads Association (MGRA). As December turned to January of 1955, Alonzo took on the job as a legislative agent for the MGRA beginning with the Ninety-Seventh State Legislature; he would serve at each succeeding session through the Hundredth (1955–1962). As a legislative agent, he acted as a communicative link between the MGRA and the state legislature. Alonzo facilitated cooperation and the free flow of information between and among the interested parties. By all accounts, Alonzo was hired for several critical reasons. He had previously been named to serve on the liaison committee to work with GOP members of the Ninety-Seventh Legislature, so he knew a great many of the legislators, he was an exceptional legal intellect, and he possessed a natural ability to bring people together.

A nonprofit organization, the MGRA (now the MBTA, Maine Better Transportation Association) was founded in 1939. The association’s purpose was to recommend and endorse legislative
In January 1955, Alonzo Conant became the legislative agent for the Maine Good Roads Association (today known as the Maine Better Transportation Association). As the association’s legislative agent, he was acknowledged as an authority on state highway matters and instrumental in the improvement of roadways throughout the state of Maine. He held this position until his untimely death in January 1962. Photograph from *The Maine Trail*, July 1955.

In early April, the MGRA held its annual meeting in Augusta where the Board of Governors met and the annual election of officers ensued. In the afternoon business session, Alonzo reported on the progress of highway legislation that was before the legislature at that time. The guest speaker of that meeting was John A. Volpe, Commissioner of the Department of Public Works, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The take-home message from
his speech was that of support for the president’s multibillion-dollar highway program. Eisenhower had been advocating for the construction of an interstate highway system since 1953. In 1944, Congress had authorized a national project, but it had always been woefully underfunded. Eisenhower insisted that fully dedicated funding was necessary for the project, and he was determined to get what he wanted. Volpe stressed the obvious economic advantages of the program to the New England area.

A second speaker, Maine Senate President Robert N. Haskell of Bangor, lambasted the Maine Petroleum Industries for campaigning against the one-cent gasoline tax increase proposed
by the MGRA. The increase was needed to provide road construction, and a bond issue was needed to subsidize the remainder. He urged MGRA members to inform their legislators regarding their displeasure in this matter. The irony of wanting good roads but not being willing to pay for them was and perhaps always will be a conundrum.

As the May adjournment of the Ninety-Seventh Legislature wrapped up, the Gasoline Tax Act passed. It required that the gasoline tax be raised from six to seven cents per gallon. The tax would provide approximately $2,600,000 in additional revenue. The revenue would support the construction and upkeep of the highways. As reported in the Lewiston Daily Sun on June 7, 1955, below a photograph of Conant, “Highway legislation will be reviewed this Thursday by Judge Alonzo Conant of Auburn Municipal Court at the June Meeting of the Maine Good Roads Association at Waterville.” In a parallel article in the July 1955 edition of The Trail magazine, the MGRA formally expressed thanks to Judge Conant “in appreciation of his efforts on behalf of the Association’s legislative program,” as he gave a detailed report on the highway bills acted upon by the Ninety-Seventh Legislature. That particular session, ninety-four bills were heard by the Highway Commission, and most were hurriedly handled in the closing days of the session. Dissatisfaction with the legislature’s handling of the highway matters was one of the reasons that the association hired Alonzo. His down-to-earth, straightforward manner was indeed what was in need; he was able to think through and make sense of sensitive and highly charged subject matters. As MGRA’s contract lobbyist, Alonzo skillfully promoted the association’s legislative agenda with the Maine legislature.

On December 13, 1955, the opening of the Augusta extension of the Maine Turnpike came to fruition. The new segment was a mere two months behind the original schedule due to delays caused by two hurricanes. It was the day when Augusta marked
the halfway point along Maine’s great traffic artery through which commerce flowed to and from the heart of Maine. An extension of the turnpike to northern Maine was contemplated, but the 1956 Federal Highway Act authorizing construction of the Interstate highway system put the initial turnpike plans to rest.

Alonzo was an important facilitator as these great steps forward were taken to ensure the transportation systems opened Maine to the rest of New England and beyond. The turnpike contributed to the industrial development of Maine by providing safe and fast access to Maine markets, Maine’s vacation resorts, and more importantly, to the entire United States. The popularly known National Interstate and Defense Highways Act eventually freed up the states to concentrate on intrastate issues. Alonzo was highly respected by legislators and collaborators in the highway industry for his acknowledged authority in state highway matters. He would remain indispensable throughout his tenure with the MGRA.

Alonzo was resolute in fulfilling the important work for the people of Maine; he did so with dogged determination. Acclaim and admiration readily came to him; however, he felt that hard work and good solutions were tantamount to praise. That philosophy filled and reflected his deeds. It would be the basis of lessons his daughters would learn from him. Both would graduate from college, and both pursued life and their work with great happiness, vigor, and joy. Alonzo was not a quitter. The measure of the man is whether or not he makes a difference. Alonzo made a difference.

On June 8, 1955, just seventeen days after the legislative adjournment, Alonzo’s beloved mother, Lottie, succumbed following a long illness. She was seventy-four years of age. She was survived by her only son, Judge Conant, three brothers and two sisters, two granddaughters (Sue and Ellen), and several nieces and nephews, most of whom still lived in New Brunswick, Canada. Lottie had lived with Judge Conant and his family. Sue and Ellen always
remembered their grandmother looking out the bay window as they played in the yard. Her face would be full of concern, on alert, yet she never said a word. Her granddaughters sensed her protective presence. They felt safe, and they loved her very much and she them. Sue and Ellen also remembered that all day, every day their mother took care of Lottie from morning until night. There were evening back massages to soothe Lottie’s weary body and soft-spoken words of comforting love. Her loss weighed heavily on the entire family.

As 1956 approached, life in the Conant home had weathered the storms of political disappointments, the joys of a new job for Alonzo, and the death of the family matriarch. There would be a lot of horsing around in the years to come, and the family would grow by two.
CHAPTER 8

Family Life

The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home.
—Confucius

As 1956 commenced in the Conant household, world events were boiling and roiling in a whirlpool of agitation. The first aerial H-bomb (ten million tons TNT equivalent) was tested over Namu Islet, Bikini Atoll; Egypt took control of the Suez canal; France and Spain recognized the sovereignty of Morocco; and the first transatlantic telephone cable, designed to link both the United States and Canada to the United Kingdom, was inaugurated. The cable also established leasable circuits for West European countries. Those circuits would directly connect them to the United States and Canada. Hailed as a major breakthrough in telecommunications, the project brought two million dollars in revenue to the three countries.

As the face of the world was being transformed and reshaped by the current events, Maine was also undergoing a transition. In the words of Heraclitus, “There is nothing permanent except change.” Change can come in different sizes and shapes, and change can be mean, messy, and marvelous all at the same time. On the home front, Maine’s textile mills were feeling the strong arm of competition from the South. The southern textile mills had easy access to locally grown cotton and paid their workers very low wages, which in turn reduced their costs. Outmatched by
their southern business rivals, the Bates Manufacturing Company closed their Androscoggin mill. That change was devastating, for the closing rendered thousands of lost jobs for Mainers. As a consequence, thousands of Mainers left the state to find work elsewhere, many of whom were friends and extended family of Alonzo and Ruperta. This was the same mill that Alonzo had worked in during his college years.

The Auburn library—where, as a young child, Alonzo had spent multitudinous moments exploring Mark Twain’s characters—added a wing to accommodate a growing user community. Always active in the community, one year before his death, Alonzo would be elected as the library’s vice president. (31 January 1961; Lewiston Evening Journal.) The new wing of the library, with its collections of books, periodicals, films, and music, was a fantastic resource for citizens. It was a positive change that was needed, easily assimilated, and welcomed by the town.

In the Kittery-Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the first atomic submarine, the USS *Sailfish*, was commissioned, putting Maine ahead of all other shipyards in the United States. On the state government side, the term of the governorship was changed from two to four years.

In the ensuing four years, change would come to the Conant family. At times, the changes would be challenging, and at other times the changes would be enchanting. One delightful addition to the Conant family belonged to the taxonomic family Equidae, was odd-toed, and was most commonly referred to as the horse. Two horses would come to live with the family and bring great joy to the Conant daughters.

As the old saying goes, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” It was an appropriate idiom when it came to describing the Conant girls. Alonzo first developed his love for horses when he was a young man at the family farm in Turner. He remembered being held in his mother’s arms, touching the soft nose of the work horse and
feeling the hot breath as the animal nuzzled his tiny two-year-old hand. His love of the Standardbred racing horse was evident as he stood “on the rails” in a full double-breasted suit and complimentary porkpie hat at the Lewiston racetrack. He would go there in the early morning, before work. As the fog slowly lifted from the clay track, Alonzo would stand in the cool of dawn to watch the beautiful Standardbred horses, seamlessly trotting and pacing through their morning workouts. He felt the fullness of the exercise as the athletic equines, with their nostrils flaring and their hearts lub lubbing, called upon their nervous systems to simultaneously employ their slow- and fast-twitch muscles to achieve a perfect performance. The noble Standardbreds would be training in preparation for the evening race. Alonzo never purchased a Standardbred racehorse. He did, however, commit to memory the lineage of all the foundation stock. He never trained or raced a Standardbred, yet he chronicled race results with passion. The attic in the Conant house held hundreds of issues of trotting horse magazines.

The Standardbred is a horse breed best known for its proficiencies in harness racing at a trot or pace. The breed traces to eighteenth-century England. The foundation sire was a thoroughbred by the name of Messenger. He was imported to the Americas and produced his best known great-grandson, Hamiltonian 10, who is considered to be the foundation sire of the breed and from whom all Standardbreds descend. The Standardbred horse pulls a sulky with a driver, and was originally described as being able to trot a mile within a standard time of two and a half minutes. The trotter of the breed moves its front leg and opposite rear leg at the same time, in a diagonal gate. The pacer of the breed moves its two legs on the same side simultaneously, the feet are lifted and put down together—a beautiful sight to see!

The roots of Maine harness racing go back to numerous fair meets around the state. In 1935 the state of Maine authorized pari-mutuel wagering, and legalized betting commenced at existing
tracks. To this day, the Maine agricultural fairs are the heart of Maine harness racing. The fairs support Maine horse breeding, which in turn has kept harness racing alive in New England. Harness racing has all but vanished elsewhere in the country.

The call to the racetrack, and horses in general, seemed to be familial. Years after their dad's death, Sue and Ellen would officiate as marshals at the Lewiston racetrack. They would parade the horses before the race began, allowing the potential gamblers a good look at the elegant equine. At the end of the race, they would then pick up the winner and parade the victor for all to admire. The girls would reap the tidy sum of eleven dollars per night. During the late 1980s, in addition to her full-time job as the manager for AAA Travel Agency, Sue worked as a pari-mutuel specialist at Lewiston and Scarborough Downs. In the summer, she worked the pari-mutuels at the fairs throughout the state. The passion for horses was deeply rooted in the Conants' lives. It was a common thread in the fabric of the Conant cloth that tied the generations together.

As children, the Conant girls always felt the excitement of the family spring trip to Hanover Shoe Farms in Hanover, Pennsylvania. It was the largest and most successful Standardbred breeding farm in the world. Once there, the girls were captivated by the beauty of the sweet little foals. Watching the curly-coated neophytes with their long, gangly legs frolicking in the luscious, green alfalfa grass was a sight to behold. The foals would gallop full-out, leap into the air like a spinning top, then buck and whinny with great glee. Their joy effervesced like a bottle of Dom Pérignon Rose Gold, just popped.

Alonzo reveled in the bloodstock that were descended from horses and ages long past; his photographic memory held the layers of bloodlines in a mental spreadsheet, all recounted and recalled with ease. Alonzo spoke like a robust robot as he sped through the litany of lineage, line after line. He would weave in and out of
the subset of data like a hyped-up search engine. His mind was a catalog. His love for, and knowledge of, the Standardbred horse was stellar. To date, Hanover-bred horses continue to dominate the harness-racing world.

Racehorses were never found grazing in the family pastures; however, American Saddlebreds horses were! The breed was affectionately referred to as the American Horse. It found its roots from riding-type horses bred at the time of the American Revolution and was used as an officer’s mount in the American Civil War. As show horses, Saddlebreds were exhibited in Kentucky as early as 1816 and were a prominent part of the first national horse show in the United States, held at the St. Louis Fair in 1856. Saddle horses, with their fine flair, were suited for the sport of horse show competition.

True to Alonzo’s promise, as written to Sue while he was “somewhere in France” in June of 1945, he gave to his girls “ample opportunities to develop both your mind and body.” Finding that Sue and Ellen loved horses, as stated in the same letter, he “afforded them instruction.” His clearly expressed desire for his daughters was that: “After you have acquired poise, resulting from mental and physical coordination, have found humility; and have developed and expressed a desire to advance the worth-while things in life, the world will be a little better for your having been a citizen.” Horseback riding and showing horses was physically and mentally demanding. Sometimes called “the sport of kings,” horseback riding was a costly and dangerous endeavor. Riding lessons were needed to reduce the danger. Alonzo engaged one of the best English equitation riding instructors in the Northeast to steward his daughters’ education in the fine art of horsemanship. Her name was Ruth J. Karahalis and she lived in Byfield, Massachusetts. Through the next few years, the Conant family would travel four and half hours, round trip, so that the girls could receive training in the difficult skills needed to safely ride a horse and learn the finesse required to successfully compete in horse shows.
Alonzo left no stone unturned as he sought safe, sane, gentle, and well-trained horses for his daughters to ride. The girls remember the excitement of travelling to Meriden, Connecticut (six hours in car, which felt like forever!), to ride and return home with their first horse. Her name was Primrose Pat; Alonzo would call her Patty Girl. She was an American Saddlebred—tall, thin, bay in color, and as smart as she could be. Pat had been trained in the advanced movements of flying changes of lead, piaffe, and passage. She was kind, quiet, and the ultimate teaching professor for the girls. She knew all of the required movements needed for competition, and she was trustworthy and safe to handle. The girls adored the beautiful mare.

While on a family trip to New York City, some years before, the family had gone to the National Horse Show. There and then, the girls were bitten by the horse-show bug. First established in 1883 by a group of affluent members of society, the show was typically held in November.

The second horse to come to 650 Center Street was an American Saddlebred mare by the name of American Maid. American Maid had been owned and successfully shown by a young woman in New Hampshire. Alonzo was contacted by her father with the news that the mare was for sale. The date to visit their farm was set, and the trip was on. Like the trip to Connecticut, the trip to Concord, New Hampshire, was filled with anticipation and electricity as Sue and Ellen looked forward to meeting the lovely mare. The rainy weather precluded any extended riding. The girls simply rode the beautiful mare up and down the long drive, put her through a few elementary paces, and that was it. The girls were ecstatic. They exclaimed: “Daddy, Daddy, she is perfect.” Alonzo nodded and smiled. The mare would prove to be perfect partner for Sue, as she accumulated hundreds of ribbons in her quest to qualify for the national horse show held annually at Madison Square Garden in New York City.
American Maid was light chestnut in color and fifteen-two hands at the withers. Her movement was poetry in motion. Her doe-like eyes were soft in expression and perfectly placed in her angular, finely chiseled profile. She was feisty, and she knew all there was to know about winning blue ribbons. That she would do, over and over again. She was the perfect horse for the girls.

Horseback riding had become a family sport. The girls spent countless hours in their barn. As the sun came up and subsequently went down, Sue and Ellen dug the dung, filled the water buckets, threw the hay, brandished the brushes, and shampooed, braided, and polished the horses. Pots and pans from the house soaked and suzzled manes, tails, and hooves; the barn-school instruction
provided superior equine scholarship. The girls learned profound lessons of discipline as they rose in the early morning to haul the splashing, icy water in the freezing cold of winter. The barn was a safe and happy place, and the Conant girls were a well-oiled team—a team that felt the joys of accomplishment and the rigors of hard work.

Summer weekends would find the family travelling throughout New England, winding their way through the bumpy back roads of Vermont and cruising the blackened surface of the Maine Turnpike. At times, the states and the horse shows became one. Oh, the miles that were covered! It was a veritable blur. On occasion, the family could be found in Massachusetts on Saturday and then in Vermont on Sunday.

Once at a horse show, paperwork verifying the names of riders, horses, and owners was completed, classes were entered, and any veterinarian papers that were required were validated. As the classes commenced, there was a flurry of hustle and bustle. Horses were whinnying, the public address system was screeching, and people were mulling and milling around the in-gate to get a glimpse of their favorite riders and horses.

Once again, Alonzo could be found “on the rails.” He was omnipresent as he stood, strategically placed, at a predesignated spot on the outside of the horse show riding arena. His was an ever-encouraging presence. The girls always knew where he stood. He could be seen mouthing “Good job” as he smiled and nodded his approval.

The Conant sisters loved the fun of competition and respected the rules of the game. They were skilled and accomplished horsewomen, and they won most of the classes that they entered. Their success in the arena brought countless awards with championships from both the New England and the Maine Horse Associations. Alonzo, the ever-involved citizen, held board offices in both associations and was a key organizer for them. Sue and American
Maid did qualify for the Madison Square Garden’s national horse show, but Alonzo’s untimely death precluded Sue’s participation.

As 1956 turned into 1957, family life for the Conant family was filled with happy happenings. There was school, dancing lessons, summer horse shows, summer swimming, and sultry summer evenings enjoying the familiar music of Gilbert and Sullivan at the Theater at Monmouth. Thirty-two miles round trip from Auburn to Monmouth was quite a distance to travel, but to be part of a Gilbert and Sullivan show was “worth its weight in gold.”

Alonzo Conant Jr. not only served his community and state in multiple capacities for much of his life, but he also gave freely of his evening hours, regularly giving talks to local civic organizations. Weekends were reserved for family fun. Shown here are daughter Sue, brother-in-law Harland Turner, wife Ruperta holding Ellen, Alonzo, and father-in-law Myron Turner at Pine Point Beach in southern Maine.

Gilbert and Sullivan were the creators of such beloved works as *The Mikado*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*. An unlikely duo, Gilbert was an unsuccessful attorney turned comic
poet and Sullivan was a promising serious composer. But together, they produced light opera laced with funny lyrics and heart-warming music; they were jesters and long-lasting chroniclers of a great time in British history. With their imagination and talent, they delighted theater-goers, and more than a century later, their comic operas are still entertaining audiences throughout the world.

These shows at the Theater at Monmouth delighted the Conant family with their stage lighting, colorful costumes, witty dialogue—Alonzo particularly love the wit—and beautiful orchestrations. The productions always proved to be fantastic, and the family loved the theater.

As a young man, Alonzo had performed in Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* at Edward Little High School, and according to the Lewiston Evening Journal (February 18, 1957 [re. 1932]), “Alonzo Conant, Jr. as Captain Corcoran was very convincing.” As told by Alonzo to his daughters, he had sung some memorable high notes in a performance of *The Pirates of Penzance* at Bates College. The team collaborators of Rodgers and Hammerstein also held high honor in the Conant music playbook. Broadway brimmed with their musical theater as they wrote a string of popular musicals in the 1940s and 1950s by putting original dialogue into song. The favorites in the Conant household were *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*. Music from the blond music console, with albums neatly stacked side by side, filled the living room with the rich melodies and evocative lyrics of “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’,” “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” and the lovely “Bali Ha’i.” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out Of My Hair” was the girls’ favorite. Alonzo himself embodied the lyrics of the song “Cockeyed Optimist” from *South Pacific*; his whole being was ostensibly stuck “with a thing called hope.” Those particular lyrics from Rodgers and Hammerstein described Alonzo’s personality to a tee. Music was a staple in the daily doings of 650 Center Street.
The controversial topics addressed by both musical partnerships, such as racial prejudice, bigotry, and cultural divides echoed the issues that were happening in real life. Wide white metal signs with bold black letters that read “Whites Only” sparked the first lessons that Alonzo taught his daughters about discrimination, racism, and injustice. During a family ferryboat trip to Norfolk, Virginia, in the 1950s, the signs hung heavily over the bathroom doors, a dark reminder of the tragic “Jim Crow” past. Living in the North in a mostly white state, the girls had never seen a sign anything like that. They knew nothing of segregation or racism. As Alonzo carefully wove his way through the complex subject, he said: “We are connected and responsible for each other in many ways, and must treat each other fairly. It is wrong to do otherwise.” Alonzo opposed racism, prejudice, and bigotry.

The Conant girls remember vividly the Broadway shows in New York City. The bright lights, the tedious traffic patterns (don’t step off the curb!), the pandemonium, and the taste of puffed pretzels that were salted and topped with mustard. Delicious! They remember seeing Jack Palance, a great American actor, while on a bus ride to the theater. What a memory that was! It must not be ignored that Alonzo was very partial to Italian opera. His daughters are filled with nostalgia as they recount the vision of their dad, standing in the “sun spotlight,” center stage in the living room, with his lungs fully filled and his head thrown back; he was in a vocal pas de deux with his favorite world-famous American tenor, Mario Lanza, as he sang, “O’ sole mio sta nfronte a te, sta nfronte a te!” His deep, loud roar filled the air; he would reminisce of his World War II days in Italy and discuss the opera. The black vinyl 78s of “O’ Sole Mio,” “Ave Maria,” and “Arrivederci Roma” were played and the songs were sung untold times. Alonzo, Ruperta, Sue, and Ellen became a quartet of four singular voices in a resonant cacophonous chorus! Those were happy times.
The lively mind of Alonzo was also intrigued with the empowering knowledge of history. Alonzo’s innate curiosity regarding the chronology of events that shaped the course of history was fueled by his voracious reading ability. Ruperta told the girls about his ability to “stay up all night long reading. He would easily finish a book before the sun came up!” One of Alonzo’s keen historical interests was the Civil War. That violent conflict between the Union and the Confederacy was dramatic and defining. It is reported that Maine’s enthusiasm for the cause of preserving the Union resulted in the largest number of fighting soldiers deployed, more than any other Union state. Maine’s Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment played key roles at the Battle of Gettysburg, as did the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery Regiment, which aided in delivering the decisive defeat at the Siege of Petersburg, Virginia. Nine months of trench warfare was responsible for cutting off supplies to Robert E. Lee’s army and precipitating his surrender at Appomattox. Loss of life and limb is estimated at 620,000 lives, roughly two percent of the population in a war of unprecedented violent and bloody battles; it was an astronomical loss of life in a war fought between citizens of the same country! Since Alonzo’s ancestors served in the Civil War, such as Winslow Conant in the Co. F 13th Maine Infantry, it is more than conjecture that family discussions piqued his interest in this historical war.

Alonzo studied the war throughout his life. Volumes of Civil War publications, essays, brochures, maps, charts, and graphs could be found stacked, dog-eared, and well used in the home and office libraries. The war came to life for his daughters as, in the late 1950s, Alonzo took his daughters to the source. The striking mental images of the Battle of Gettysburg as depicted in the Cyclorama were vivid and memorable. Created after the American Civil War, the colossal circular oil painting depicts the movements of the Confederate and Union infantries during the Battle of
Gettysburg. There, in that gallery, the girls were immersed in the climactic moment of the three-day battle. So three-dimensional was the overhead canopy that Sue and Ellen actually felt as if they were standing in that very field in the midst of the horrific charge. It was an experience that they would never forget.

The history lessons continued when the family travelled eighty-two miles southeast to Washington, D.C. U.S. Route 15 South chauffeured the two-tone brown Oldsmobile ninety-eight and the Conant family directly into the nation’s capital. Entering the capital in the 1950s, one discovered Washington, D.C., a city of cosmopolitan flare, the world’s most powerful democracy, the seat of national government, and a grand commercial center. The landscape was in sharp contrast to the unique relatively small city of a few thousand residents of the Civil War era. During that conflict, the historical rural city was transformed by President Lincoln into a military encampment that housed seventy-five thousand troops. The troops hailed from several states for the express purpose of defending the city from the Confederate army. The soldiers were housed in government buildings, including the Capitol, Treasury, and Patent offices. Tents filled the landscape that we know as the National Mall.

Standing on the avalanche of stairs, Sue and Ellen were mindful as they listened with intent while their father, in a primer-like presentation, brought the Treasury building’s Civil War saga to life. Alonzo’s quiet and purpose-filled voice and descriptive delivery honored the armed soldiers, many of whom were from the Fifth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. One century prior, they had stood at the ready to protect the president in the event the fighting met the doorstep of the White House. It was a compelling story about a building that housed the engine that managed economic and financial systems and the world economy. Alonzo gave life to historical facts.

A short two miles via Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues mapped the way to the United States Capitol. There, the
history lessons continued. A monument to the American people and their government, the Capitol houses the meeting chambers of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Standing in the balcony of the House of Representatives, the young sisters saw the semi-circular rows of chairs, a huge hanging American flag, tiers of centrally placed desks, and marble surrounds. It was imposing, empty, and quiet; they stood alone with their family. Alonzo gave an abbreviated, succinct summary. He spoke of how the quiet of the gallery would be transformed and become replete with thundering voices in legislative debate as laws were hammered out by the great deliberative body. Compromise was sought as the two houses, equal and unique, worked the will of the people who had elected their representatives. Alonzo’s daughters knew that their dad had served in the state version as a representative. They were young, but their father made clear the importance of a democratic government that served as the voice of the people. It all seemed very immense, untouchable, and unknown, but also very important. Years after Alonzo’s death, the tradition of debate, so near and dear to him, would become a favorite of his youngest daughter, Ellen, as she gave voice to propositions while a member of the University of Maine debate team in the late 1960s.

During the late 1950s, Washington, D.C. would be a source of job offers for Alonzo. Duly discussed and weighed, the offers were declined. Alonzo and his family would never go back to Washington, D.C. Alonzo returned to his hometown, his judgeship, and his law practice. One thing that is known for sure—change is certain. Alonzo’s health would start to decline.
CHAPTER 9

Loss and Death

*I sustain myself with the love of family.*
—Maya Angelou

In October 1958, the excitement and anticipation of the birth of the newest Conant family member, the third child of Alonzo and Ruperta, were palpable. Showers were given, good wishes abounded, and Sue and Ellen were jumping with joy as they awaited the arrival of the new baby, Scott. The *Lewiston Daily Sun* of August 23, 1958, detailed one of the baby showers, a blissful occasion. The “stork shower” was hosted by Ruperta’s close friends and neighbors, Mrs. Russell Chaplin, Mrs. Clifford Chaplin, and Mrs. Bernard Keough. There was a decorated blue-and-white basket and a “little clothesline, with clothes and toys attached, spelled out the words Baby Conant.” It all conveyed a strong feeling of affection for the radiant mother-to-be. Baby Conant’s impending birth electrified the air. One might say that you could hear the twelve bells at London’s St Paul’s Cathedral rehearsing to “sound out” his arrival. Pure delight abounded.

The months of anticipation and preparation for Scott’s arrival ended tragically, as he was stillborn on October 6. Ruperta nearly lost her life during the difficult and fatal delivery. In the 1950s, medical research and its sophistication regarding Rh incompatibility and pregnancy was in its early understandings. It is now known that if the mother is Rh negative and the baby is Rh positive, the mother’s body will react to the baby’s blood as
a foreign substance. The mother's body creates antibodies against
the baby’s Rh-positive blood. The antibodies can cross the placenta
and attack the baby’s red blood cells, causing hemolytic anemia in
the baby. The red blood cells are destroyed faster than the body can
replace them. Destruction of red blood cells results in the baby’s
death. Scott’s unrealized experiences were dashed. Sadness for his
days not lived overwhelmed the family. He is buried at Mount
Auburn Cemetery, alongside his parents.

Twenty-three days after laying baby Scott to rest, Alonzo
was confronted with cold politics. Political appointments were in
the air, and Alonzo’s judgeship, which he had held for close to
twelve years, was in jeopardy. Alonzo’s tenure presiding over the
Auburn court was due to end, and his hope was to be reappointed
to a concurrent four-year term on the Auburn bench. Alonzo had
been appointed by three Republican governors: Horace Hildreth,
Frederick G. Payne, and Burton M. Cross. He had served three
successive appointments from 1946 to 1958. But it looked like
Governor Muskie was not going to reappoint him.

Alonzo could take a sharp elbow, yet he never got into the
“blame game” of politics; he preferred instead to focus on substance.
On September 8, Governor Ed Muskie, a Democrat and Alonzo’s
classmate at Bates College, had sought and won the U.S. Senate
seat. He would leave Maine to assume his position in Washington,
D.C. It was the last time that Maine would hold its election in
September. After 1958, the elections would be in November.
One of Muskie’s final official gubernatorial duties before moving
to Washington, D.C., was to refill the judgeship in the Auburn
Municipal Court.

Even though Alonzo had served Governor Muskie for four
years, Muskie’s agenda and Alonzo’s aspirations were at polar
opposites. Muskie was at the end of his governorship and had
a candidate from his own party in mind for the judgeship. On
its face, party politics appeared to supersede Alonzo’s exemplary
record. Seemingly, Muskie chose to ignore the copious kudos from the rank and file of judges and countless contemporaries regarding Alonzo’s adjudication of cases. Alonzo had one of the best-run courts in the state and was considered one of Maine’s best judges regarding juvenile cases.

On October 30, in a flurry of political drama, Alonzo resigned two weeks before the end of his term. The *Lewiston Evening Journal* of October 30, 1958, ran a pithy article headlined: “Conant Resignation Stirs Political Pot to Boiling With Rumors on Successor.” The article described the fascinating details. Alonzo had gone to Augusta to query Governor Muskie about the approaching appointment. As Alonzo came out of a meeting with Muskie, the awaiting press corps questioned Judge Conant about the meeting. “I had a brief interview with the governor,” he said. “In my thirty-second interview with Mr. Muskie, he told me he was going to post the name of Irving Isaacson for the judgeship.” Sue and Ellen asked Mr. Isaacson about this incident in an interview on August 28, 2014. He said, “Ed called me one day and asked me if I wanted to be a judge. I said sure.”

Alonzo summarily shunned the parlor games of Augusta, but Muskie had used his political capital to deny Alonzo’s reappointment, story over. So Alonzo would resign effective November 3 upon completion of his court duties. In response to his resignation, Alonzo’s friend and court recorder Thomas E. Day Jr. followed suit and did the same. He had two more years remaining on his appointment. It is remarkable, especially in this day and age, that Alonzo was thrice appointed by three different governors—a testament to Alonzo’s worth as a magistrate.

Losing his son, almost losing his wife, and losing his job was trying, tragic, and terribly sad for Alonzo. As the fall of 1958 folded into a new year, Ruperta’s father, Myron Stillman Turner, succumbed following a short illness two years after his retirement. He was seventy-five years old. He had spent forty years working
JUDGE ALONZO CONANT (1914–1962)

at the Burnham & Morrill company, where he started as a clerk and ended as the superintendent of the corn canning plant in China. He was a member of the Vassalboro School Committee, the Vassalboro Masonic Lodge, and the Riverside Congregational Church. Ruperta’s love for her father was deep; his death was crushing. Ruperta and Alonzo bore the burden together, as always. Teamwork suited them well.

Alonzo, true to form, squared his broad shoulders and worked diligently for the Maine Good Roads Association, litigated law, and grew his law practice. His law office was located at Suites 5 & 6, 11 Turner Street, on the second floor of the National Shoe and Leather Bank Building. The office was immediately across the street from the Androscoggin County Courthouse, at what had been Alonzo’s courtroom for twelve years. On August 19, 1959, Alonzo was commissioned as a real estate broker by the Maine Real Estate Commission. By augmenting, bundling, and expanding his professional skills, Alonzo prepared for the future. He believed in tomorrow.

Despite setbacks and tragedy, Alonzo always remained positive and looked ahead. Life was not a burden for Alonzo. According to the Kiwanians of Auburn in a letter to Mrs. Conant upon Alonzo’s death, Alonzo’s life exemplified “the ideals which motivate our highest endeavors.” The letter went on to note the following:

Especially are we mindful of those qualities of mind and soul that give personality to life. Alonzo Conant stood for cheerful service to others, both in his private actions and through public responsibility. He was concerned about good government and the welfare of Civil Servant. He devoted thought and time without stint to the affairs of young people. He was fond of animals. He met hardship and pain with courage and in silence.
Loss and Death

In a letter from Alonzo dated July 12, 1960, from his room in Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston to his daughter, Sue, Alonzo’s failing health is revealed. His fatherly pride is clear:

Dear Sue,
I was sorry that we did not have more time to chat, Sunday, at Camden. As it was, I stayed too long and was late returning to the hospital about 10:30 p.m. when I arrived here, Sunday night. I thought that you did an excellent ride in your equitation class. Ellie did, too. I was very proud of both of you. You looked very fit, Sunday, and I hope that you are feeling as well as you look. I’m still undergoing tests and don’t know how long I shall be here. As soon as I can, Mother and I shall visit with you. I spoke to Uncle A1 about you returning home for 2–3 days before the Gorham show, in order that you can work the Maid [her horse].

Love,
Dad

Due to failing health from polycystic kidney disease (PKD), Dr. Milan A. Chapin, Alonzo’s internist in Auburn, sent him to Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) to confer with Dr. Wylan Leadbetter, who was the chief of urology there. Patients came to MGH from all over the world for treatment; it was a leader in new research, medical procedures, and practices. Leadbetter and Chapin had been fellow classmates at Bates. A native of Livermore Falls, Maine, Dr. Leadbetter also was clinical professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School, and was a former president of the American Urological Association. He wrote or coauthored about eighty publications on urology or related topics and developed pediatric urology at MGH. Upon Dr. Leadbetter’s retirement, he remained in Boston as a consultant, and then moved back to Maine to take a position at the Millinocket Hospital as the head of
urology. He died in Millinocket at age sixty-seven in 1974, twelve years after Alonzo's death.

Dr. Milan A. Chapin graduated from Bates College and went to Clark University to earn a doctorate in chemistry, then to Boston University where he graduated with a medical degree and became an associate professor. He came back to Lewiston, Maine, where he served as chief of staff at Central Maine Medical Hospital (CMGH) from 1948 to 1967. He died on June 8, 1981, age seventy, at CMGH following a long illness, nineteen years after Alonzo's death.

PKD is a genetic disease characterized by the growth of abundant cysts in both kidneys and is usually an adult-onset condition. The renal cysts are fluid-filled, and their growth slowly replaces much of the normal mass of the kidneys, thus diminishing kidney function leading to kidney failure. The disease affects approximately four hundred thousand people in the United States; there is no cure. When the kidneys fail, currently, dialysis or renal transplantation is the treatment. In the 1960s, dialysis was in its youth. Dialysis was only available on a limited basis at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City, and at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. Alonzo was not offered dialysis, and renal transplantation was unavailable. He was offered and accepted experimental surgery.

The surgery involved cutting the cysts from the kidneys. However, removing the cysts does nothing to increase kidney function. Clinical experiments reveal that when a big cyst is removed, small cysts quickly fill with fluid and become large. In the 1960s, when Alonzo was offered the untested surgery, incising the cysts was a pilot program. Alonzo embraced life and the hope of more time to live and better days to come, but it meant facing the difficulties of an experimental operation. He did so with disquiet and conviction. His kidney disease was a private matter. Fearing for his family's financial future and worried that his clients would
abandon him, he kept knowledge of the procedure confidential; only family members were privy. As there was no medical insurance coverage at that time, Alonzo was required to pay the full amount of the estimated cost of the surgery in advance. He sold land in the amount of ten thousand dollars for that purpose.

Alonzo was a man of 210 pounds, and his surgery revealed his kidneys to be the size of footballs, weighing approximately ten pounds each. The average weight of an adult human kidney is about one-quarter pound. The surgery was difficult, his incisions deep and long. He was left weak and debilitated; his life was irreversibly and completely altered. A child of twelve, Ellen recalled the fear that she felt one day after her father's operation. She saw the pain on his face, the determination in his eyes, the image of a once strong, handsome figure of a man in quiet courage grasping the hanging rod hung from the ceiling. Kidney disease, experimental surgery, and the possibility of pneumonia—Alonzo was fighting for his life.

Ruperta and Ellen stayed in a hotel just across the street from the hospital and were by Alonzo's side all day, every day. Sue was working as a horseback riding instructor at Seal Bay Camp for girls in Brooksville, Maine. As the days became one, Alonzo's doctor called Ruperta at the hotel. There was no face-to-face meeting, and the call was cold and impersonal. “Take him home,” the doctor said, “and get his papers in order. He probably won't last a year. There is nothing else we can do for him.” History holds and offers only what the time has to give. The biting, deadly news destroyed the once-held hope that there would be “more time.” As a nurse, Ruperta knew full well the outcome. She was fearless. She collected and collated the hospital papers and settled the hospital bill. Melancholy was not her sister.

The family left the Baker House at MGH for the last time. The Baker House was demolished in 1992. Today, the National Institutes of Health conducts research studies on polycystic kidney disease, as does the Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine.
Jackson Laboratory has the largest collection of mouse strains in the world and has bred specific genetic stock to study human diseases. They house a strain of mice that has polycystic kidney disease. As knowledge grows, specialties spin off. In this day and age, Alonzo would have been able to live a long and productive life.

In an early August fog that floated from the mighty, dirty river Charles, Boston was soon in the rearview mirror of the Conants' turquoise Mercury sedan. Storrow Drive, smothered with sea smoke, slippery from pouring rain, felt the determination of Ruperta as she drove, with only one windshield wiper working, 112 miles in two hours to the Gorham Horse show; Alonzo had promised to be "on the rail" as Sue competed in her equitation class. It was the final eligible qualifying class of the season for the Madison Square Garden's horse show.

As Gorham came into view, the rain receded, the sun slid from behind the nimbostratus clouds, and a radiant rainbow appeared, revealing a spectacular spectrum of colors, a kaleidoscope of brilliant blues, yellows, reds, and greens. It was a good omen. The first order of business was to park the car in a grass-covered area, and then to situate Alonzo in the blue-and-white webbed chaise lounge. Covered with a plaid Pendleton wool blanket, he was broken in body, but the strength of his spirit was Herculean. Strength and dignity were his clothes.

Sue's warm-up ride arched concentric circles around Alonzo. Her patterns of trot, canter, flying changes of leads were precise. Alonzo's still and quiet approval framed his palpable and prominent pride. Alonzo was right; he knew horses and he knew his daughter's abilities. He knew his daughter's love for her horse. Sue won first place in a very large class. It was a good day; she had qualified to compete in the Madison Square Garden's horse show. The fleeting feeling of hope lived. Perhaps he would live long enough to see Sue ride her beautiful horse in New York City. It was a happy and buoying thought.
Alonzo would live one year and six months after his operation. During those eighteen months of constant pain and weakness from his disease, he tried to come back better and stronger. He carried four one-gallon bottles of water with him wherever he went. With the hope of extending the failing kidney function, he fastidiously followed the doctor’s orders to flush his kidneys. His legs were weak under his weight; his stride faltered. It was measured and shaky. Some who didn’t know of his plight callously used wounding words to describe his gait. They said things like, “Hey, did you see Judge Conant? He looks drunk. Can’t even take a straight step!” To this day, deep feelings of sadness wash over his daughters as they recount those hard-edged words. In a letter to Ruperta shortly after Alonzo’s death, Justice Donald W. Webber, a friend and colleague, wrote, “Lonnie came in my office about three weeks ago and I was very much worried about him then. He seemed to have difficulty with the stairs and his color was bad.” The date of that meeting was approximately five days before Christmas in 1961.

In the seventy-eight weeks prior to his death, Alonzo, too weak to drive his car, pushed himself to finish the unfinishable list of his life. Those days seemed a poetic narrative of his short forty-seven years. With Ruperta at the wheel of their turquoise Mercury sedan, the lists of to-dos were methodically completed. Some days were good, some days were bad, but all days held the work that he was determined to do. Alonzo travelled to Augusta several times a week as he tirelessly served the Maine Good Roads Association as their representative at the legislature. He continued to represent his clients in court, and he went to his office each and every day, albeit in total exhaustion. Ascending the steep white marble steps to his office challenged every fiber of his being. One might ask, “Why did he do all of those things? He was dying, for goodness’ sake.” Simply put, he cared. He loved his work, and he was committed to serving his state and his community. He was a
hometown lawyer and judge who was part of the glue that held the fabric of society together. He reminded us that with conviction and courage, all things are possible. It is a legacy to be proud of.

Alonzo had a great love for animals. As a boy, living on a farm, and as a man, living in town, dogs, cats, colts, and calves were all an important part of his life; all held his heart. It seemed natural, one might say, that his last legal legislative act was presented by him to the One Hundredth Legislature, where it was passed and subsequently signed by Governor John H. Reed. The act ratified and confirmed the original incorporation of the Lewiston and Auburn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. On May 10, 1961, a short seven months and twenty-five days before Alonzo’s passing, the law was enacted as Chapter 169 of the Private and Special Laws of Maine.

Unknown to most, Alonzo provided free legal work for countless people and organizations. If he could help a person in need, if it served the community in a positive way, and if he could do the work, he did it with no questions asked—no money requested or required. What he had done for the Lewiston and Auburn Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, he did for many. To Alonzo, life was more than self. So many days, the back steps of the Conant home were full with paper bags, filled to the top with fresh garden vegetables; no notes, no words, only bags of fresh produce left anonymously. Payment.

Christmas day, as his daughters wept, the ambulance attendants lifted Alonzo’s broken body into the waiting vehicle. He left with a soft wave and a quiet “I love you” on his lips. His kidneys had failed. In the evening of his life, death came in the dark of the night on January 4, 1962, ten days after he left 650 Center Street for the last time. The life that he lived and loved, with its multiplicity of stories, was gone. The threads of his life unraveled. He had written the best chapters of his life while he could; he contributed good lines and passages to those of others. His chapters were full
and filled; his years were short and significant. What might have been, if he could have lived a little more, was never to be. His life had mattered to many, yet it was wistfully incomplete. He would never see his little girls grow into accomplished young ladies and then to mature women; he would never walk them down the aisle. He would never grow old with his beautiful and devoted Ruperta.

Alonzo Conant Jr. died at age 47 on January 4, 1962, from polycystic kidney disease. This genetic kidney disease was untreatable at the time. His obituary ran in Boston and Maine newspapers, including the one shown here on the front page of the Lewiston Evening Journal of January 5, 1962.
In the days following Alonzo's death, the local Auburn funeral home was witness to hours of a steady stream of more than four hundred family members, friends, and colleagues. Hundreds of artfully designed floral arrangements of all sizes and shapes, filled with the fragrant flowers of calla lilies, gladiolas, chrysanthemums, carnations, orchids, and roses, were perfectly positioned to accommodate the long lines of respectful mourners.

On January 8, 1962, at 2:00 p.m., the Elm Street Universalist Church was filled to overflowing its 299 sanctuary capacity as Reverend Robert H. MacPherson officiated Alonzo's funeral. Alonzo had been on the board of trustees, taught Sunday school, served as a moderator of the parish, and had been the legal counsel for the church. In the large brick Gothic Revival structure, built in 1876 by John Stevens of Boston, Massachusetts, the emotional service included testimonial speakers representing the Kiwanis Club of Auburn-Lewiston, the Eureka Lodge No. 48, Knights of Pythias of Auburn, the Androscoggin County Bar Association, the Maine Good Roads Association, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). The Captain Frank W. Hewlett Post of the VFW conducted the military memorial services. In 1955 Alonzo had been elected judge advocate of the VFW of Maine. The outpouring of community grief was overwhelming.

Alonzo is buried in the family plot at the Mount Auburn Cemetery. In the early morning, photographed in the light, his headstone of pink Scottish granite reveals an etched diagrammatic scale of justice, which is underscored with the deeply chiseled quotation “His Life was an Inspiration. His memory is a Benediction.” With decades of public service, Alonzo Conant left behind a memorable record of accomplishments. In his hometown and native state, he was known to be a man of integrity. He was respected and well-liked. Honesty, decency, and fairness are all terms commonly strung together to characterize his reputation. Warm and kind describe his heart.
Judge Alonzo M. Conant, Legislative Agent for the Maine Good Roads Association and prominent Auburn attorney, died January 4, in a Lewiston hospital. Previous to entering the hospital he had been ill at his home for some time.

The 47-year-old former jurist became Legislative Agent of the M.G.R.A. in January of 1955 when the session of the 97th State Legislature convened, and he served at each succeeding session through the 100th.

His work among legislators won for him the highest esteem and respect of those on the State House scene. He was an acknowledged authority on state highway matters.

“The Judge” or “Lonny”, as he was known to his many friends in the highway industry, gained his initial legislative experience as a state representative from Auburn in the 90th Legislature. This and his legal background contributed greatly to his success as Legislative Agent for the Maine Good Roads Association.

A native of Turner, he was educated in Auburn schools, graduated from Edward Little High School and from Bates College, from which he received an A.B. degree. He also attended Peabody Law School in Portland and following World War II New York University.

Admitted to practice before the Maine bar in 1939 and the U. S. District Court in 1949, he had a distinguished career as an attorney and jurist. He served as municipal court judge in Auburn for 12 years, resigning in 1958.

Active in Republican circles throughout his adult life, he served his party as a member of the GOP State Committee and chairman of the Androscoggin County Committee.

Throughout his career he received special recognition numerous times for his work on behalf of individuals and groups. During World War II he served with the U. S. Navy as a gunnery and legal officer before being separated from service in 1946. The following year he was awarded a citation by the Navy for “service rendered to the United States Naval Reserve.”

Judge Conant maintained an active role in the life of the youth of his community and state, serving with several organizations dealing with youth activities.

Too, he was active in numerous civic and social groups and Masonic bodies, including Tranquil Lodge of Masons, Scottish Rites Bodies and Kora Temple.

Surviving are his wife, the former Roberta Turner of Vassalboro, and two daughters, Sue and Ellen.

Funeral services were held January 8 at the Elm Street Universalist Church in Auburn, on whose board of trustees he served. A delegation representing the officers and members of the Maine Good Roads Association attended.

The Maine Good Roads Association in Augusta, Maine printed this obituary of Alonzo Conant Jr. in their publication The Maine Trail. The full-page article was published on page 5 of their February 1962 issue. (Note: Alonzo Conant Jr. did not have a middle initial, so the “M.” is an error.)
Almost eight years after Alonzo’s death, an article from a family newspaper clipping described Auburn’s Christmas tree:

The majestic Canadian balsam fir tree standing in Vincent Square is more than just a lighted tree. It’s an emblem of a man’s continuing service to his community.

In 1925, when he was 10 years old, the late Alonzo Conant, former Auburn Municipal Court judge, obtained that tree and five pine tree saplings from property owned by his family at Fredericton, N.B. He brought them back to Auburn and planted them at his home on Center Street.

As Judge Conant grew in years and stature to become one of the community’s leading figures, he participated in civic affairs with distinction.

Almost eight years ago, in January 1962, “Lonnie” Conant died at the age of 47.

The land on which he planted the trees was sold—the house, still occupied by his family, was moved to another location. But the tree Judge Conant planted as a boy stands today serving the community as did the man.
Sources Cited and Consulted

Books


**Business and Residential Directories**

Androscoggin [County] City Directories: Various years from 1870 to 1960.
Sources Cited and Consulted

Resident and Business Directories of Auburn and Lewiston: Various years from 1870 to 1960.

Census Records

Canada: Various years from the late 1800s to the early 1900s.

United States: Various years from 1900 to 1962.

Family Letters

June 27, 1945. Letter from Lt. (JG) Alonzo Conant to his daughter, Miss Sue T. Conant. At the time, Alonzo was serving aboard the SS Deborah Gannett. The letter was sent during wartime from “somewhere in France.”

July 12, 1960. Letter from Alonzo Conant, who was at the Massachusetts General Hospital, to Miss Sue Conant at Seal Bay Camp, North Brooksville, Maine.

January 8, 1962. At the death of Alonzo Conant, a Resolution of Respect letter from the Eureka Lodge, Order of Knights of Pythias, to Ruperta Conant.

January 8, 1962. At the death of Alonzo Conant, a Resolution of Respect letter from the Kiwanis Club of Auburn-Lewiston to Ruperta Conant.

January 9, 1962. Thomas E. Day Jr. sent a letter of condolence to Ruperta Conant shortly after Alonzo Conant’s death. Day, from Lewiston, was Alonzo’s colleague and friend.
January 10, 1962. After Alonzo Conant’s death, Associate Justice Donald W. Webber sent a letter of condolence to Ruperta Conant. Webber was Alonzo’s colleague and friend.

**Internet**


**Interviews and Oral Histories**

In the spring of 2013, via the phone, the author interviewed Isabell Noble. Ms. Noble is Alonzo Conant’s cousin from Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada.
Sources Cited and Consulted

Author and her sister interviewed Irving Isaacson on August 28, 2014.

Oral histories are on file in the Muskie Oral History Collection, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine: (1) Arnold Levitt interview by Andrea L’Hommedieu, MOH 413; (2) Bill Rocheleau interview by Stuart O’Brien, MOH 054; and (3) Irving Isaacson interview by Rob Chavira and Stuart O’Brien, MOH 027.

Military Records

The military records of Alonzo Conant Jr. were obtained from the National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. They enclosed his applications to serve, physical examinations, annual evaluations, and separation papers. Conant’s “Reports of Voyages” for the time he served on the SS Hannis Taylor, the SS Silvester Gardiner, and the SS Deborah Gannett were also examined. These records were obtained through the National Archives Trust Fund, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, Maryland.

Newspapers


January 5, 1938. “Alonzo Conant, Jr., of Auburn, Elected Editor-In-Chief of the Peabody Law Review, the Only Law Publication in Maine.” *Lewiston Evening Journal.*


July 26, 1941. “Conant Calls Off His Plan For Mass Meeting.” *Lewiston Daily Sun.*


March 31, 1950. “Congratulations, Judge.” Lewiston Daily Sun. [Photograph of Judge Conant being congratulated for being picked to serve on the GOP State Committee.]


November 15, 1957. "Bergeron Threatened To Fill Trooper With Lead, Handed Two Jail Sentences." *Lewiston Evening Journal.* [Judge Conant and his family were also threatened.]


January 9, 1962. “Atty. Alonzo Conant Dies at CMGH [Central Maine General Hospital], Well Known Attorney, Succumbed Thursday Night at Hospital.” *Lewiston Daily Sun.* [Four columns with photograph on front page.]


Periodicals


School Newspapers and Yearbooks

*Bates College Mirror*. 1935 and 1936.


This biography is a daughter’s search to examine her father’s short but full life. The author, Ellen Conant Krohn, was fourteen in 1962 when her father, Judge Alonzo Conant, died at age forty-seven. This book documents Judge Conant’s ancestors, his early years as a farm boy from Auburn, Maine, to a distinguished career as a lawyer, state representative, Naval officer, municipal court judge, authority on Maine’s highways, and community leader. This memoir is an insightful description of Judge Conant’s selfless service to his family, community, and country. Conant’s biography exemplifies how one person’s desire to serve, can become the catalyst that helps to bind a community together.

ELLEN CONANT KROHN is the youngest daughter of Judge Alonzo and Ruperta Conant. A native of Auburn, Maine, she graduated from Edward Little High School in 1965. Four years later she graduated from the University of Maine, Orono, with concentrations in English and Speech. After college, Ellen taught English and Public Speaking at Winthrop High School, and Edward Little High School. Subsequently, Ellen worked for AT&T, New England Telephone, and GTE telephone companies. She is an accomplished equestrian and lifelong lover of horses. Ellen’s previous publication, Cogitations, is a chapbook of poetry. Now retired, Ellen lives with her husband in Brewer, Maine.