

## ***THROUGH THE HISTORIAN'S LENS***

### **THE FABULOUS BRUNETS – Boyne City's Olympians**

***By Patrick McCleary***

*The Charlevoix County History Preservation Society*

[Throughthehistorianslens@gmail.com](mailto:Throughthehistorianslens@gmail.com)

For fans of the Olympic Games, the road to Milano Cortina 2026 picks up pace in 2025. It will soon be one year exactly until the Games begin on February 6, 2026. With it being a non-Olympic year, there are world championships in almost every summer and winter sport on the Olympic program- with Olympic qualifying events in winter sports a part of this 12-month countdown. Kicking this off are the European Championships in Tallinn, Estonia, held between January 27<sup>th</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup>. This brings to mind a time when the Olympic Games and in particular, world-renowned Olympians resided within our very midst.

**PIERRE EMILE ERNEST BRUNET (1902-1991)**

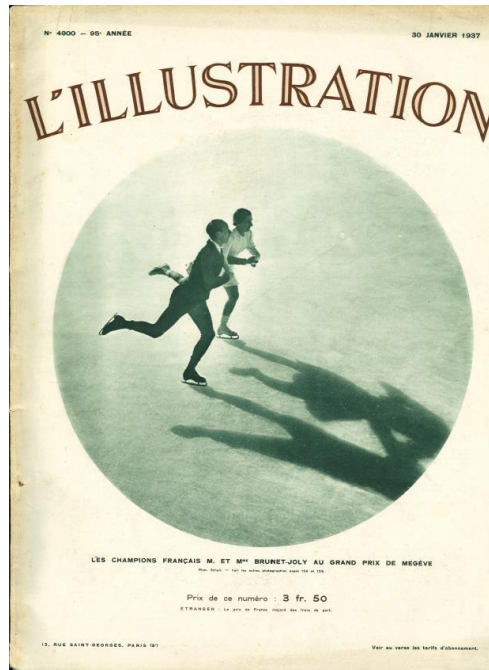
**ANDREE' MARGUERITE BLANCHE (JOLY) BRUNET (1901-1993)**

Perhaps the most world-renown residents of Boyne City were the French Olympians and gold medalists Pierre and Andree' (Joly) Brunet. The French figure skaters drew fame in their early years but made their name as partners- both before and after their marriage. Together they reigned supreme in pairs figure skating in the 1920s and 1930s, winning two Olympic titles and inventing several new moves that helped take their sport to a new level.



**[Pierre and Andree' (Joly) Brunet as they appeared in a French Press Release photo, taken during their Olympic reign.  
Photo courtesy of the Patrick McCleary collection.]**

Pierre and Andrée soon became the best and most famous figure-skating pair in the world. Pioneers in their event, they took their sport to a new level, inventing, among other things, mirror skating, the one-hand lift and a variety of new spins. Together they won the world title four times in a row between 1926 and 1932. In the meantime, they produced a brilliant performance to win Olympic gold at St. Moritz in 1928 and retained their title four years later at Lake Placid, competing by this time as "Brunet and Brunet," having married in 1929. Their popularity prompted press coverage in every form, even small advertising cards inserted into the packaging of French chocolates!



**[A Brunet Magazine Cover as it appeared in the French publication, *L'Illustration*, dated January 30, 1937. Courtesy of the Patrick McCleary Collection.]**



**[Having reached celebrity status, their 1929 wedding in Paris, France was a notable event. Photographs such as this one appeared in tabloids around the world. Courtesy of the Patrick McCleary Collection.]**

L'ILLUSTRATION



In protest over Hitler's regime and Nazi Germany, the Brunets refused to defend their title in the 1936 Winter Olympics. The duo retired in 1936 to become coaches-summering in their home at 423 Pearl Street in Boyne City and teaching figure skating in the winter months at Madison Square Gardens in New York City. Their students included Olympic gold medalist skaters, Alain Giletti, Carol Heiss, Scott Hamilton and World Champion, Donald Jackson.

A perfectionist from an engineering background, Pierre Brunet was known for introducing his technical cleanness and precise style to figure skating. Andree' frequently made headlines among the French tabloids, once when she broke with figure-skating tradition and wore black skates like her partner instead of the traditional women's white.

Joly, born in Normandy, France in 1901, married Pierre Brunet in Paris in 1929. In addition to their two Olympic gold medals and Olympic fame, the "Fabulous Brunets" were also awarded the Legion of Honor by France- the highest French Order of Merit, established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte. This medal and other Olympic memorabilia are now housed within the collection of the Boyne Heritage Center.

In addition to touring the world, the Brunets resided in France, England, Canada and the United States. Pierre Brunet died in 1988 and Andree' passed at age 91, both her husband and her only son, predeceasing her. All three are buried in Maple Lawn Cemetery in Boyne City.