

INTERVIEW WITH MARY SAWYER
SUBJECT: WORLD WAR I AND WORLD WAR II

Rick: Okay, Miss Sawyer, what do you recall of Palmyra during the war years?

Mary: The First World War or the second?

Rick: Both of them. If you would like to speak of both of them.

Mary: During the first World War, I was away from home a good deal. I was in college, so I didn't know too much that went on here. I do know that they were very active in welfare work. There was a committee formed to look after the families of the men who were in service, and they did a great deal for them. In the file in the library, there is, or was; I hope it is still here, the minutes of the work of that committee. It's a bound volume, and probably someday, you might like to look into that. As I say, I was away, so that I was not in on much of the actual work. The women formed a Red Cross Unit, of course, and there was a great deal of knitting going on, particularly and making of kit bags (I think some places, they were called ditty bags.) They were a good size and heavy material and filled with the things that the boys would need.

There might be toothbrushes, toothpaste, comb, pack of cards - things of that sort for them. I think they contained cigarettes, a package of cigarettes too. Of course, people were very conscious of conservation, food conservation, sugar, and flour particularly. I remember during a vacation period that first summer of the war, going about calling on various people, asking them to sign a pledge card to conserve sugar, flour, the fats, butter, etc. It was at that time oleo margarine began to be used particularly because the butter was sent overseas and those at home had to get used to using the unrefined flours (dark flours), and the women who made their own bread had quite a time getting it to be palatable and light and so on. I found that true when I was in college; we had the dark breads and, again, conservation of sugar. Our sugar was served to us in little envelopes, well, they weren't plastic really, but oil paper, something of that nature, and they contained just a teaspoon of sugar. We had those at breakfast. You could use them in your coffee or your cereal as she chose are divided, and he's a little in each one. I don't recall that we were deprived of anything, that is that our meals were not good; they were as good as possible under the restrictions that the head of the Kitchen Department of the college was concerned. We had enough to eat, but there were those restrictions.

Rick: What do you remember of WWII?

Mary: World War II, I was just going into that. Much the same thing took place there. I don't remember that we were restricted too much. We had sugar ration tickets. You could buy just so much sugar at a time, and you had the stamps to give with it. Meat was rationed in the same way. There would be stamps which you paid along with your money when you bought meat so that you didn't have a great deal. I think in most families, meat was served two or three times in the course of the week.

There was a great deal of activity among the women too, and Red Cross work, knitting, rolling bandages, folding the gauze bandages. The offices above the florist shop was given over to the Red Cross-those two big front rooms, and we worked up there. Mr. Griffith, Mr. Henry Griffith owned the building at the time, and he gave the use of the rooms to the Red Cross, and the woman met several times in the course of the week. There was nothing done in the Second World War, that I recall, concerning the welfare committee for the families of the men who were in the service. I don't know just how that was taken care of, but as I recall, there was nothing of that kind done. We were very active and, again, conservation of food supplies. I don't recall that we had to use the dark flours in the Second World War as we did in the First World War. From that standpoint, our bread was better, but it was an active time, of course-a very serious time. In many ways, I think people were more aware of it almost than in the First World War, although I could be mistaken in that, as I say I was here during those years and saw from day to day what was going on whereas in the First World War I was away much of the time.

Rick: What about gasoline rationing? Did they have gasoline rationing and World War II here?

Mary: I think so, but we had a car at the time, and I don't recall that we had any difficulty getting gas as we wanted.

Nancy: Didn't your car have a sticker on it, though-either an A or a B?

Mary: It might have Nancy. I really don't recall that.

Nancy: I'm quite sure ours did. It's something to do with the amount you could have.

Mary: It may have been true in Pennsylvania and something that was not used here. I was driving during that time, and I don't recall anything on the windshield.

I don't recall that clothing was particularly rationed either-in either war-here at any rate. Food particularly was hard to get. In both wars, there were a great many gardens (Liberty Gardens, I think they were called), and people would take any little patch of ground that they had and work it up and plant vegetables particularly. In both wars, we had quite large gardens, so that we raised a lot of the vegetables that we consumed. There was a great deal of canning, not very much freezing in those days. That was ahead of the time. I think that came along perhaps at the end of the Second World War, but there was a great deal of canning.