

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY SAWYER
CONDUCTED BY NANCY RUBERY, RICHARD VAIR, AND JOHN WEISS - 4/15/1980
SUBJECTS: REVIVALS

John: I wanted to ask you about churches and revivals and religion. Were there revivals in the 1920s?

Mary: I don't remember very many actual revivals. It seems to me a long, long time ago there was one somewhere on Canandaigua Street, I would say, across from the school, but I don't know what lot it would be because it's pretty well built up there and it may have been farther up on Canandaigua Street., above Jackson Street in the block between Jackson and Birdsall Parkway. There was a time that was all open country. It seems to me there was a revival up there somewhere, which lasted probably the better part of the week. I know nothing about it personally as I was young and not interested in it. But I think personally it was conducted by someone from outside, some evangelist who came in and preached to the people. That's the only one I recall.

The churches themselves have all been very active. From time to time they would have special missionary meetings, preaching, that kind of thing. I do recall one, 25 or 30 years ago, that was held in the Episcopal Church, and was conducted by Canon Edgar West from the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York. It was a preaching Mission which drew from all of the churches. The first meeting or congregation was not much more than our own congregation, but from then on it drew people from other churches. He was a great preacher. He had a great personality so he did draw many people to the mission. It was really a very inspiring thing. It is the only one I ever recall participating in.

John: About what year was that?

Mary: I said it was about 25 or 30 years ago. I remember Leo S. Cook was our rector at the time. It was he who was instrumental in bringing Cannon West here. Probably in the late forties or possibly early 50s.

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SUBJECT: BAZAARS

Nancy: What about other church activities? Moving into a small town as I did 20 years ago, it was a revelation to me that each church had a bizarre; and that churches had suppers. We just didn't have those things in the part of Pennsylvania where I lived. Can you remember some of that sort of thing?

Mary: That is true. The bazaars came as they do now, about Christmas time. The church suppers, which were held to raise money for the churches, were largely put on by the women's organizations. Those suppers were held throughout the year. Sometimes they were just for the members of the individual churches. But more often, I would say, they were open to the public, in order to raise money. I remember for a long time the Baptists held a fish fry along about Saint Patrick's Day, about the middle of March. They were very good and we're well attended by people from other churches. But in the fall for a long time, Saint Anne's Church put on a turkey dinner, which was open to the public. That was when Mr. Hickey was very active, and he ran it, did the cooking, and overseeing the whole thing. They were delicious. The women were the workers generally, the men helping to serve. The same thing helps with all the big church is. I don't recall ever knowing of any of the Reformed Church. They probably had get-togethers of their own people, and perhaps held true for all the big churches. I don't recall ever knowing of any at the Reformed Church. They probably had get-togethers of their own people as a money-raising object. I don't know. As for dinners or suppers open to the public, I don't recall that they did that. But the rest of us did. There was a time in my church, The Episcopal Church when the ladies put on bridge luncheons. Sometimes there were evening parties also to raise money. Other ladies would want to entertain friends and they would ask us to put on such a luncheon. We did that a number of times after we had our own Parish Quarters. We haven't done it since we've had the new building, but I think there have been one or two. They were well patronized; and good suppers.

Nancy: It's evident that the Catholic Church has had this kind of thing because the cupboards over there in the kitchen are filled with plates, and the drawers are just full of forks. There are hundreds of forks, knives, and spoons. So they must have had large groups.

Mary: I understand the kitchen was the room on the left as you come in at the big Parish House. But that, Mrs. O'Neill, told me, had been turned into the Sacristy. The kitchen had been given up and it was made either Sacristy or church office. Now would you know about that?

Nancy: There is a very small kitchen there right now, and what it looked like at the times we put on the suppers, I don't know. If one were to enter the Church Hall from the south, it's on the left.

Mary: Yes. That was where it was. And there was also an entrance to the outside so that you could carry supplies in. Before we had Parish Quarters, Saint Anne's very kindly gave us the

use of their kitchen and dining hall. And I remember working there in that way and it was a good kitchen then. Well equipped there on the left side.

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SUBJECT: CLOWN PROJECT

Nancy: What about the other churches' projects? Tell us a little about the clowns.

Mary: That is a project which has been going on for more than 20 years, I think. It came to us from an Episcopal Church in Brooklyn to which a former Palmyra lady belonged and worked in the women's group. Her sister visited her. (Glad Brokaw) visited her sister, Mrs. Montague, and saw what they were doing and thought it would be a good project for us, and brought a clown and pattern home. She presented it at a St. Margaret's meeting and suggested that we start it. We didn't know how the thing was put together at all, but Mrs. Harter, the President, whose mother was living with her, was adept at sewing. She ripped the thing to pieces to find out how it was made and I guess it was she who worked out the pattern, ironed all the pieces, and found out. We started with it. They figured out how it was put together. Some of us rather scoffed at the idea. We didn't think they would go over at all. I worked with them on the second session. I was called by Mrs. Harter. She said she understood that I could sew and I told her yes. She asked me if I would join the party. Well, I thought, what a waste of time. We'll never sell these things. If we sell 25 we'll be doing well. But I went and I worked and have been ever since. That probably was somewhere, I know more than 20 years ago. Instead of the 25, the last I heard there had been more than 20,000.00 sold. And that was several years ago. So I don't know. They have literally gone all over the world, and have been sent to the western part of this country. There was a lady here for a while who went to Japan and she took some to friends out there. They've gone to Europe. I can't tell you where all they've gone. So it has been a fine project. We started out selling them for .50cents. We are now selling them for \$2.00 apiece. We filled them with beans at first, which is what they are supposed to be, of course, bean bags. But the beans got so expensive, we gave that up, and we now are using dried corn, which is baked to kill any insect life that may be in it. We discovered that that might be the case. It is quite a project, and it has become more or less a production line. Different ladies do certain things. We have never had a President. We've never organized in that way at all. Usually, one person takes care of the finances, and we look to her as the leader of the group, but she kind of falls into it. It is Dorothy Jeffery right now; Hester Lawler had charge of the finances for quite a long time. When she had to stop work, Dorothy took it over. We've had new people come in from time to time. I think I am the last of the original group still to be working. There are one or two still living, but they are not able to work. So it has been quite something.

Nancy: You do clowns every Wednesday morning?

Mary: We work every Wednesday morning.

Nancy: Do you purchase fabric or do you receive it as a gift?

Mary: We had quite a lot of fabric received from Mrs. Paul Rubery. It has gone very, very well. They have to be fairly big pieces because the body of the clown is probably 10 by 5 or 6 inches

square. It takes a fairly big piece. Most of the material is purchased. That includes the yarn: the cotton for stuffing the caps, the organdy for the ruchings, and so on - the bias tape which is used to bind the edge of the ruchings. Although now, one of the ladies has taken to cutting bias from the material that is used in the clown, so we haven't been buying too much of the bias tape.

That's the story of the clowns.

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SUBJECT: MRS. CHARLES ZIEGLER

Mary: Mrs. Ziegler was a great historian. I'm sorry this kind of thing couldn't have been done when she was here. Because she could go back in memory even earlier than I can.

She came here as a little girl, probably 5 to 7 years old, and rather grew up with the community so that she knew these early people. For instance, the other day I mentioned Dr. Adams, and she was living and practicing when Mrs. Ziegler and her family came here. Mrs. Ziegler remembered her very well. So it was things like that, people of that sort, she could have told about very definitely and interestingly.

Nancy: I wish I had known her.

Mary: I wish you had. She was a delightful person. She was my first school teacher. I'm afraid I gave her a hard time. She used to call me Little Miss Spider, so you can figure where I was. Here, there, and everywhere I guess. But, she was on the Board of Trustees of the library for many, many years and served, I would assume, in every official capacity. At her death, she was President of the Trustees. She was excellent on the Book Committee. She was on that committee originally when I came into the library. And, she just had a canny interpretation of reviews. She could pull them apart. But you could be pretty sure if Mrs. Ziegler passed on the book, it was a worthwhile book. After I took over (that was after she was gone) I was head of the library. I missed her very, very much in that capacity. She was a wonderful person. She had a great sense of humor. Just a downright fine person. She had many, many friends all through town.

Nancy: She was very instrumental in organizing the local history.

Mary: She was the first one to have charge of the museum which was the first half of what is now the main library room. That was two rooms. She had the historical collection in that front part.

It was a small collection at the time, and could easily be housed there. But it grew. She was very much interested and really did a magnificent job of organizing it.

Nancy: Did the Palmyra Historical Society have anything to do with that museum? Or was it a project of hers?

Mary: It was a project of hers. Years and years ago, there was an Historic Palmyra Society. I think it was called Palmyra Historical Society. Mr. Sanford VanAlstine was the moving spirit of it. It was he who started collecting things. The card catalog of the biographical material; the little three-by-five cards; with his project. The material and the big file folders now in the big metal files, he started. He left Palmyra and moved to Rochester. And while all that pertained to

Palmyra, it was his own personal property, and when the family moved, he took it with him. He continued to collect while he was in Rochester. He died there, and following his death, his wife sent all of that material back here to Palmyra. I think Mrs. Ziegler was already here and starting the museum so that it came here to her. She more or less sorted it and checked it and cared for it. So we really are indebted to Mr. VanAlstyne, primarily for it and to his wife for sending it to us, and to Mrs. Ziegler for caring for it as she did. It expanded under her hands as things came along.

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SUBJECT: WINTERGREEN HILL

Nancy: Where is Wintergreen Hill?

Mary: Wintergreen Hill is now, as I understand it from Mrs. Ziegler, is what we know as Walton Hill, just the other side of the Quaker Road. The corner of Maple Avenue and Quaker Road, back in there. It extends quite a way back on Maple Avenue as I understand.

Nancy: Why is it called Wintergreen Hill? Do you know?

Mary: I suspect because wintergreen grew there in the old days. I never heard any other explanation about it.

Nancy: It was mentioned in Alice Benjamin's paper. The dissertation that she wrote. She made mention of it, but there was no explanation of it.

Mary: Mrs. Ziegler, I think, was the one that got it located. She was the one who told me about it.

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SUBJECT: SCHOOLS

John: What are your recollections about the schools and the way education was in general, and if you could, specifically? After Mrs. Ziegler was your teacher.

Mary: It was a school all the way from first grade to senior high school. And it was all housed in one building, which stood on a lot to the south, which is now the playground. The original school stood about where the south end of the present building is. There were two houses between the Episcopal Church and the original school. When my school was ready and occupied, the original school to which my father and Mrs. Ziegler went was torn down, and that lot made into a playground. Then when my school was outgrown, and they needed the new school which was also by then kindergarten through Senior High School, the two houses next to the Episcopal Church Rectory (there were three that were in there) were torn down, so that the present school occupies what was my playground and the sites of those two houses. The house right next to the Episcopal Rectory stood just about where the north driveway is. The first Kindergarten was organized while the school was on the south end of the lot. The second big school was still in use. There was not room for a Kindergarten there, so they rented the big house across the street. The first Kindergarten was held there. Now, whether they had the whole building or not, I don't know. But they used the first floor for the Kindergarten. And that was about 1916, I would say. I'm judging that from the time my nephew first went to Kindergarten. I went over with my sister when he was entered into Kindergarten. And he probably was five the next December. I think he entered when he was four. It remained there until the present big school was ready there was. There was an addition put on to the second School some years later after I was in school. That took in a grade on the first floor, I think, the fourth grade was housed there. And the high school study hall above. It was a great big room. The Assembly Hall was to the front of the building, along the south side. We went from room to room. It works just as you do now. The grades were mostly on the first floor, and of course, the children remained in those grades. Every morning there was a chapel service up in the Assembly Hall to which the children went.

Nancy: Was that conducted by the principal of the school?

Mary: Sometimes it was conducted by the principal, sometimes by members of the faculty, usually I would say, it was the principal. The principal's office was on the second floor early in my school career and later it was moved into one of the rooms downstairs. Just why I don't know. There was no library. I remember a bookcase in the principal's office where there was a set of 6 or 8 volumes of reference work. I suppose it was something in the way of an encyclopedia. But to my recollection, that was the only library that there was. Some of the teachers had books of their own at their own desks which we might use, perhaps a dictionary. I don't recall any unabridged dictionary until I got to the eighth grade, high school or so. So you see, it was a primitive situation, but they turned out some pretty well-educated people too. There were not too many college students at that time.

Nancy: Did it begin at 9 and did you go home for lunch?

Mary: It began at nine o'clock and we were excused about noon. I presume a few minutes before noon. I presume a few minutes before noon and everybody went home to lunch except the children who came from the country. They were driven in by their parents mostly (horse and buggy.) If they lived only a mile or so out, they probably walked in. Children came from East Palmyra on the train for high school. The day started as I say about nine o'clock, we went home to lunch, we came back and classes probably started probably shortly after one. So you see we only had an hour lunchtime. The children who lived down east of the village (down and what we called Hen- Peck) the end of Vienna Street (the west end of Main Street) walked home, ate their lunch, and walked back. School ended at about half past three. Sometimes there were extracurricular activities, not a great deal in athletics, some basketball. The gym was up in the attic floor really and it has been made into a gymnasium of sorts. There were baskets up there for basketball. We had very good basketball teams. There were two or three years that the Palmyra teams won the county championship.

Nancy: Boys and girls teams?

Mary: Boys, mostly. Girls played but there was no interscholastic team play of the girl's team that I recall. There may have been after I left school. You see I had two years in high school here and then I went away to school so what happened in those years after I left, I don't recall but it was mostly the boys.

Nancy: Was there a mid-morning recess period when you all went outdoors?

Mary: The very little children, as I recall, did have a recess. In good weather we went outside, in winter weather windows were opened and we'd stand up in the aisles by our seats and go through calisthenics of one sort or another, bending up and down in our arm motions, etc., that sort of thing. There was no organized plays out of doors, we just ran around and played tag, hide-and-seek, and prisoners base as we wanted to.

Nancy: What is prisoners base? Not hide and seek?

Mary: No, it's not hide and seek, it's a running from tree to tree. There were bases, I really don't recall just how it was.

Nancy: If you weren't at the tree, you'd be caught?

Mary: I think so, something of that sort, you had to get to a tree, to a prisoner base, and then you couldn't be touched - a little like hide-and-seek except that we were right out in the open of course.

Nancy: Or Pickle in the Middle, we used to play. The one who is in the center was it.

Mary: No, I don't recall there was a center. Somebody was it, I think it was called.

Nancy: Until he caught someone else?

Mary: And he had to run around and catch someone.

Nancy: How about marbles? Did you play at marbles?

Mary: The boys played marbles a lot.

Nancy: Jump Rope?

Mary: Some girls did. I remember playing with marbles, but I never knew it is a game. I was not athletic at all, I never was and games didn't interest me very much. I ran around playing these games, but it was more just to be in motion than it was to play the game.

Nancy: Jump Rope I suppose it's something the girls did?

Mary: Some of them did. There again I had to jump rope and jumped at it, but I never got very far. I was never very adept. I just am not athletic. I was never a tennis player.

Rick: You move pretty good now for your age.

Mary: Well I can move anyway. I've always been rather quick on my feet, walking fast, that kind of thing.

Nancy: When you did go home for a noon meal, was it the main meal for your family for the day?

Mary: No. Our main meal was dinner at night. The noon meal was a lunch. You see my father was away a great deal through the day. I was very little when he was elected. In fact, I don't think I was even born when he was elected District Attorney. I do remember when he was elected County Judge, I have an impression of that. So that he spent a great deal of time in Lyons, holding court and so on, so that he would just lunch wherever he was and when he came home at night (there again he went back and forth on the train, it was before the days of the trolley) and the main meal of the day was at night.

Rick: Were the subjects you learned in school any different than the present-day subjects they teach? The subjects that you studied.

Mary: The curriculum today is very much expanded. There was no shop. There was no home economics, very little in art, some music (there was a music teacher.) There was an art teacher, but I think it was only about once a week. We didn't get it as they do now, but the rest of it was

much the same. In the grades were reading and writing, spelling, and geography. I don't recall that we had anything else in science, and the social sciences. There was what they called civics and history which I think now comes into that social science course.

Nancy: When did the study of languages begin? At what age would you begin a language?

Mary: Language started in high school. There was Latin and German originally. I never took any German. I had Latin when I first went in. There was chemistry and physics, history, English, I guess that was about it. So you see you have got many more opportunities today children have than we had.

Nancy: Mr. Tobin at the Middle School talks about reviving the Spelling Bee and about a considerable amount of enthusiasm on the part of the students. You had Spelling Bees I'm sure.

Mary: Yes, we'd have Spelling Bees. They were just in the grades. The competition I remember in high school was what we called rhetorical's. Everyone had to learn and recite before the assembly-(not the school assembly, but the study hall assembly.) it was usually done early in the morning and from those rhetorical's, a prize student was selected. I can't tell you who the judges were, but there was a prize speaker selected from each class as I recall. Now, this was done pretty much all through the county and when the classes had all competed and the top person in each of the four classes was selected, then this school had a competition between the four, and that person represented the school in the county meet. Some of them were held here in Palmyra. I remember going to quite a number of them and some of them were very good. Those were held for many years. I remember going to want to one when my sister's older daughter participated in two or three of her friends. I think that was an all high school group, then went on into the college, but I haven't heard anything of the prize speaking as we called it, as well as rhetorical, in quite a long time. I don't know whether there's anything now, did you have anything of this sort, Rick when you were in school?

Rick: No, not that I recall. We may have but I didn't participate in it.

Nancy: There is a speech class that I am aware of because we have had some students in just recently looking for material on various subjects and when I questioned them, they said that they were preparing a speech. They had to give a speech, but not the sort of competition that you're talking about.

Mary: For speech class, but not in competition at all.

Nancy: Of course, it is still done in Ireland, but that is a different story. I'll tell you about that sometime. Do you have any questions?

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY SAWYER
SUBJECT: ARTIST, PHOTOGRAPHERS

Rick: I was wondering if Palmyra had produced any artists over the years that you may recall.

Mary: Yes, right now I think of Betty Troskosky and Gladys Batterby of course doing it. My mother had a younger sister who was very much an artist. She didn't do it professionally at all, but she did very very nice work. Her forte in a way was lettering, beautiful lettering and for years she lettered the High School diplomas. In fact, I saw one not long ago that she had done, but the time came when her hand wasn't steady enough and she couldn't go on with it. Now she had some training in New York. I don't know what school. I remember her being down there. That was many years ago, but she did a great deal in place cards, that sort of thing. In fact, I had a "whole house" full of them. If we were having a family get-together she would come down and she would have a box and give it to mother and in it would be a place card for each family member of her family and many of them were preserved after. She did it for my sister too when we had dinner parties here. I gathered them all together a year ago and took them to the cottage when the family was here with the idea that they could look them over and then perhaps destroy them. My niece, Barbara Dill, who is an artist said no. She was taking everything that Aunt Louie had done and keeping it in her house, which pleased me very much. I don't know what her boys are going to do when the time comes that the house has to be dismantled, but they are intact for the time being. Some years ago when this art class started in again, that is in general as a craftwork, there was another lady here who did very nice work. She's no longer here. In fact, she died some years ago. Did you ever know Norma Butler?

Nancy: No, but I have heard the name.

Mary: Her mother lived here with Norma and she did it and I have understood that she did very nice work. In fact, I have seen some things that she has done. There probably were others that I just don't think of at the moment.

Nancy: Now Mrs. Nesbitt showed me today a painting that had come to her from Mary Ella Fraher's house. Who is Mary Ella Fraher's family would have been an artist?

Mary: Well, an old family here. Mary Ella was one of Doris's contemporaries, a year or so older than Doris, I think but they were neighbors and grew up together. Her parents lived here for many, many years, but I don't know who it might have been Nancy.

Nancy: It was a very nice oil painting and she said she had two others at least and I just saw it in passing. Well, now the photographers in Palmyra would be considered artists.

Mary: Yes, there were two, Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Elton. Mr. Elton was very much the artist. In fact, won quite a number of gold medals in national competition. There are several copies of the prize photographs in the collection down in the Market Street house and I understand his

granddaughter has a complete set of them. In fact, she borrowed a couple that we had here when the collection was housed here to have copies made.

Nancy: Do you remember Mr. Elton? Anything about his work-did he have a studio here?

Mary: He had a studio, both of them had studios down on Main Street in the block along there and there were glass cases at the entrance of it. They were all upstairs of course and there were the glass cases down at the entrance of the building, the stairway, and every now and then there would be a new set of photographs on display just as the people in Newark used to have at the old Drew's Paint Shop down there near Freddie's.

Nancy: There still is a display box at Freddie's.

Mary: I don't get down that way very often anymore so I haven't noticed whether it was still there or not. They were on display.

Nancy: Did they do their own developing?

Mary: Yes, they did.

Nancy: They didn't have other people working for them?

Mary: No. I don't recall that any of them did. I have had photographs taken by both men and I don't remember anyone ever being there with them, to help.

Nancy: Did they go out to weddings the way photographers do today?

Mary: No, they were the great big box cameras with the lens pulled in and set out, etc. and they stood behind with the black cloth over their head to shut out the light until they got it focused.

Rick: Everything had to be quite posed.

Mary: Yes, everything was posed. I remember when I was very little, they had a contraption that they put your head in, leaned back, and kind of screwed things in so your head wouldn't move. You were right there, you couldn't move at all. That was given up after a time. I suppose the cameras were improved to the point where they were a lot faster and they could take a chance on a slight move.