

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: FIRES

Rick: Miss Sawyer, do you recall any disastrous fires in Palmyra?

Mary: Yes, I remember one very disastrous fire, many years ago probably around 1908.. 1910- the corner building on Main and Market Street, on the east side where Mr. McPike had his store. There was a very bad fire there and it went over into the building next door-the building which is now gone, to the east of it. That was a very bad fire. There was a bad fire in the Clemons Block across the street at one time. Probably the two most disastrous fires that I recall were the post office fire which was the building on Main Street where the village offices now are. That was very bad, and of course, having the post office in that building, the first floor, made it doubly troublesome. My brother-in-law, Mr. Ralph Sessions, was postmaster at that time, and I remember him telling of getting up as soon as he knew where the fire was, dressing and going up and clearing out valuable records. Most of the fire was upstairs into the back, but it was a touch-and-go sort of thing getting their records, etc., and getting out before there was any serious human damage. That was very bad. I was away from home again at that time, but I heard about it when I came back.

Then, of course, there was a fire on Main and Market Street-the building where Mr. Rubery had his hardware store-and that too went into the building next door. Actually, it started in that little building which was a jewelry store, the Fassett Jewelry Store, and then went over into the Rubery building both upstairs and down the store part. The damage was mostly smoke and water, but the third floor was badly gutted so that they had to be removed and the second floor, where the Rubery's had their living quarters, I know was very seriously damaged. You might know more about that Nancy sometime. I remember being over the north side of the street and watching as the water was pouring down the stairway. They have thrown it up to get the fire in the upper floors, and then it came down, and it was just a torrent streaming down the stairway into the street. The worst of the fire was the fact that human life was lost and so far as I know that is the only time in a fire that has occurred, but that upset everyone very, very much. Apparently, there was no way of rescuing him-his wife was with him in the jewelry store, and she, with the help of someone from the outside, was able to get out, but by that time, he was probably so exhausted and overcome that there was nothing that could be done. I would say that those are the worst that I recall.

Nancy: There was a tragic Christmas fire on Market Street.

Mary: Yes, Nancy, I had forgotten that, and that was even worse because a mother and three or four children lost their lives in that fire, and it took about three houses. It started in the house where this family were, it was on Christmas Eve, and the house was just consumed in flames before any alarm was given, and just no chance of getting them out. There was another disastrous Christmas Eve fire too up west of the village in a house which had originally been a residence of the Downing family and had been turned into a restaurant, and that took fire sometime after midnight after it had closed for the night and was practically burned to the ground-not enough left of it to say attempt stay. It had its bad phase that it was a windy night. The wind was from the west, and it brought many cinders down into the village. The next morning I saw on the roof outside of my bedroom window great pieces of charred wood and there were pieces out in the backyard-in our backyard and what was Nancy's backyard at that time too. You were living here at that time?

Nancy: No, I think that was 1960 before we bought that house. Either 59 or 60. Bailey's would have been there at that time

Mary: There was no loss of life there. The house was completely emptied of people so that it was a bad loss but not as bad as the loss of human life.

Rick: Has the hotel ever burned in your lifetime, Miss Sawyer?

Mary: Yes, what is now the Palmyra Inn. There was a fire there, to come to think about it. I'm glad you bring these things up. That happened in the daytime. It was the coldest, coldest February day. The temperature was way below zero and it took fire so that they had a hard time fighting it because of the hydrants, so many of the hydrants were frozen in the water practically froze before it hit the fire. The people in the building were able to get out. They called many departments from other places. The Newark Fire Department was here, and as I recall, there was one young man who was very seriously injured. He was not warmly enough dressed and rode up from Newark on the outside of the truck, and his hands were frozen it was so terribly cold. It was a bad fire, but again no loss of life.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: AUTHORS "DURFEE"

Rick: Other than Thomas Cook has there been any notable authors from Palmyra?

Mary: Years ago there was a young man by the name of Durfee, I think who was connected with Yale and he was an authority on the Ancient Jewish Religion and Culture. He wrote a two or three-volume work on that. At one time the library had a copy of it, had a set, but in the moving from Main Street here, it disappeared so that we do not have it now. But he was well known in his time. It was before my time. I think I was a very small child so I did not know anything about it until much later. In fact, I don't think I knew anything about it until after I did come into the library. I may have heard my family speak of it, but it was meaningless to me. I don't know of anyone else

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: HICKEY'S MARKET

Rick: Do you recall the history of Hickey's Market?

Mary: It seems to me that one of the students, a few years ago, took the Hickey's Market as a topic for her social studies project. I never saw a copy of it and I have forgotten who the student was. I think it was just before I left the library. There may be a copy of it in files here. We did have some of those essays. Mr. Nash became interested and instrumental in seeing that we did have some of them. They probably are still here, It will be something for you to search for.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: PARK

Rick: Fo you recall Band COncerts in the park?

Mary: Yes, the Band Concerts were very, very popular on Saturday night. We had a band here. You probably all knew or remember hearing of James Parmer Smith who started the band or not the band but the Fife and Drum Corps. His grandfather and his great-grandfather were active members of the band. There were probably twenty or twenty-five men. They had uniforms and every Saturday night they assembled n the park at the bandstand and gave a concert. Mr. Sexton provided chairs and his workmen arranged them in rows facing the bandstand. People came from all over and sat there in the park along the street and sat in their cars so that they could listen and the applause was not only from the people gathered in the park but from the automobile horns. My father's office at the time was across the street in the rooms above what is now the florist shop, where the Red Cross rooms were, and he always opened it up every Saturday night. We went up there, sometimes the whole family or I could gather my friends together and we would go up there. The window would be open and we could sit comfortably and listen, it was a great thing. As I say, people came from all over and the park would be filled. That went on for quite a number of years. I don't know how many, but gradually the interest I suppose waned and the band disbanded so that we have not now had it regularly. Occasionally there have been summers when they would get together. I think the high school band has given an occasional concert. Another thing that went on in the park were free movies. Mr. Sexton arrange a great big screen which rolled up under the eaves of the brick house and dropped down on the west side over the windows of what now are the Girl Scour rooms. He had a projection room arranged somewhere up in one of the trees as I recall and again the chairs were arranged facing the East instead of the North and people could go and sit there and watch the movies. They had some very good movies. I don't know what night they were given and of course, they did not come on until after dark. It was a great gathering place and lots of fun, lots of noise, lots of booing and clapping, cheering, etc. when the bad man was getting his come-uppance, etc., but it was a good gathering place. It kept people occupied. While bad things went on in the village at the time, I really think there was not as much as there is today. It was something for the young people to do and their mischief was directed in other lines.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: STRAND THEATRE

Rick: What year was the Strand Theatre built? And opened?

Mary: I would say sometime in the twenties perhaps possibly earlier-about 1920.

Rick: The movies in the park went on before that?

Mary: They went on before that and I don't know how much after. You see, Mr. Sexton died in the fall of 1924, and how much before that I really am not sure whether the band concerts and the movies stopped a year or so before he died or whether they went up right through that to the time of his death.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: RADIO AND TELEVISION

Rick: Was radio a popular thing in the village of Palmyra?

Mary: Yes, it was very popular when it first came along. It was quite a wonderful thing, quite a wonderful thing. The first time I heard radio was about 1920, the fall of 1920. I was in Vermont at the time. There was quite an active University Club in the little village I was in and one of the members arranged to have a man come and put on a demonstration, a gentleman who was working in radio in those early days, and the men very kindly invited a number of us women to come in late in the afternoon after work and listen to a demonstration, really while he was testing it for the evening performance. It was not entirely satisfactory because of the atmospheric conditions. There were storms in the general area so that the reception, to hear it even so was almost impossible to understand what was being said, but the marvel to sit there in that little Vermont town and listen to something going on, probably in Pittsburgh because KDKA was the early station. I remember early that winter, being out one Sunday evening-we had been on a snowshoeing expedition-and one of the gentlemen had invited us all to come to his home after were through with the snow-shoeing for supper and he had a radio, probably the first one in this little village and again we were thrilled to take the earphones and listen, in turn, to a church service which was going on in one of the big churches in Pittsburgh. They broadcast their service every Sunday evening and it was marvelous. Just unbelievable. So really we have grown up in an amazing period of time, Then, we ourselves finally had a radio and it became very common-practically everyone had a radio and there were good programs, very good programs put on. Then, of course, came television and that was even more marvelous to sit in your own home and not only hear New York Philharmonic in concert, but to see them or to watch Queen Elizabeth being married and later her coronation was just unbelievable. Well really it's hard to believe that we can do those things and now, of course, you have all your ball games, very cheap and you can sit in your own home, comfortably, and watch if you are interested so now practically everyone (but me) has a television. What comes next is anybody's guess.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: TELEPHONES

Rick: What do you recall of the old telephone systems when they used to have operators? Do you recall any notable operator?

Mary: I remember our first telephone was a wall phone, box down at the bottom and the mouthpiece above. It was on brown wood and stood probably about that high-a foot and a half, two feet maybe and the receiver was on a long cord and hung on a hook and then there was the crank on the other side and you cranked it and central answered and you gave the number you wanted. There were only two or three phones in the village to start with and there were two lines. There was one line and there was just one phone and it was in a store, a store very much as it is now, what we call the News Room (a kind of an ice cream store, candy, magazines and so on) and there was just one phone there. If somebody off in Manchester had that line, he'd have to call here and if they wanted my father, for instance, he'd have to go down there to answer that call, I don't remember that it was used very much, but I suppose so and then gradually they came in quite generally, but they were the old phones as I say. Then came the standard one which was a great advance, all in one. Again the receiver was on a cord and hung on a hook on the phone, but the mouthpiece was right there too and of course, now there are very fancy ones and all in one small container (container if that's what you want to call it.)

Rick: At one point though all villages were their own separate phone systems weren't they? There was no interconnection?

Mary: I'm not sure about that Ricky. I don't think each village had its own system, but there were more systems than there are now, for instance, this one that I speak of was down here in what is now the News Room. That didn't last very long. Gradually this other system-the one such as we have-became to be used generally and I presume with the Bell System, but I don't know.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: ELECTRICITY

Rick: What do you recall of the development of electricity, electric lighting, and things like that? Do you remember the gas lighting days?

Mary: I remember oil lamps in my house and then gas. I think by the time of my memory developing, we had gas, although there were two or three oil lamps in the house which were still used occasionally and that was quite general. They were usually in the ceiling chandeliers such as down here in your children's room. Then that went on for quite a long time. It was the thing. The house up here on Jackson Street where McGuire and Hargrave are- so far as I know that house-when it was built in 1872, was equipped with gas though we know there may have been an oil lamp or two, but the gas was put in when the house was built of that I am sure. Electricity came in about 1910, I would say. When we moved up here to this Jackson Street house, there was no electricity. My father had that put in after we moved there, probably 1917, 1918, along in there, and the gas with the exception of one or two fixtures was discontinued and all of the lighting fixtures were electrified.

Rick: The street lamps were originally gas weren't they not?

Mary: Yes. I have a vague recollection when I was a very little girl living on Washington Street, there was a gas light about halfway down the street and I remember seeing the lamplighter go around with his little step ladder and set it up against the light post and turn on the gas and light the gas. Then when the electricity came in they were what they called carbon lights and the electricity generated formed sticks of carbon-great black sticks probably two or three inches high and as big around as your finger-and every so often those had to be cleaned out and these carbon sticks were just dropped on the ground. We, children, watched our chance and flocked around to pick up these carbon sticks and then write all over the sidewalks with them. They made black marks on the sidewalk. Then, of course, they developed still further, until now we have this type which are very clean and bright, etc.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: TECHNOLOGY

Rick: Miss Sawyer, do you have any special thoughts or special feelings about all the technical changes that have occurred in your lifetime? There's been a lot of them.

Mary: Yes I have, I have really. Probably my parents and I have grown up in the time of the most marvelous developments, technical developments. I think my thought is just that. The amazing things that have come about which probably in my parent's youth, if anyone had suggested it, they would have thought it was utterly ridiculous and yet here they are in common everyday things and in the case of electricity, for instance, if something goes wrong and we lose our electric light we're frustrated, we don't know where to turn, we don't know where the candles are and fly around trying to get light and wondering what is going to happen and how long is this going to last? Then when it comes on we just say "We'll there, there it is" and never think of all that has gone on to bring it back, all the men who have had to go out and trace down the wires and see where the trouble is and correct it. The same thing is true of the airplane, we never look at them. It was years that the marvel of the airplane stayed in my mind and if ever I heard one I instinctively looked to see it and wondered what was keeping it up there. Now if I want to go away somewhere, train travel, bus travel is so difficult my first instinct is well when can I get a plane. Can I get a plane to get to this place? Have I got to change etc.? We do it as almost a matter of course in a sense. Trains are a marvel, the automobile. I remember being taken up to the corner of Main and Washington Streets one night-my two older sisters and all the children on the street and some of the adults were gathered,-to see the first Horseless Carriage come through the town. It was a very early evening and we stood around there and waited and waited and waited and it didn't come. We heard later that it had broken down somewhere up West and was being delayed. I never did see it, the first one come because it got late and dark and my mother took me home to put me to bed. But I remember that-standing around or I guess she had me in her arms mostly up there waiting for that thing. I don't know what a Horseless Carriage was, but they look pretty much like the carriages that we had.

Rick: So you think a lot of this technology knowledge has taught us to take it all for granted? We young people take a lot for granted. We haven't been able to see all the changes that have gone on.

Mary: Yes, I think you must because when you were born they were here, they were developed and in use. The automobile was an everyday affair, it wasn't something unusual. The airplane, trains, buses, everything of this sort, the electricity. Bathrooms are another thing (inside plumbing). If something goes wrong, oh dear, oh dear let's get this fixed. Speaking of the buses and trolleys, I remember talking to one friend of mine who had children, she's an older woman than I but her children were older than you two are now, but they grew up in the early days of the automobile and I remember she told me one time that her children begged them to ride on the trolley. They had never been on the trolley and it went by their house practically every hour. They'd been everywhere in automobiles. That was no strangeness at all, but the trolley was something very unusual and they were dying to ride on it. I suppose they took them to ride on it

sometime or other. So things are taken for granted. I'm sure they are. You must have and I have come to also.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: BLACK PEOPLE

Rick: Miss Sawyer, do you recall any notable black people in Palmyra?

Mary: No, in a way no. We had one family, the family of Baxters-father and mother and there were two sons. They lived in a house up on the corner of Main and Carroll Streets where the Ford Garage now stands, a little white house and they lived up there. They were a fine family. The father was a workman around town. The sons were. The one son, who never married, -I take that back-he did marry late in life, was a workman around and took care of lawns, sidewalks, furnaces, that kind of thing. I don't remember about the father what his business was.

There was another family which came in later, a Harris family. They had quite a number of children. There were three or four girls, four or five girls, I guess one son who was a contemporary of mine I met in school. They were a good family, but I don't know that you would call them a notable family in that they were inventors or writers or anything of that sort.

There had been others earlier than that, but we have had very few colored people in the village. We have one family now, I understand, that lives up on West Jackson Street. You may have seen the children in here, they used to come in occasionally while I was still here. I don't know them at all except the children and my only judgment of the family is through them and I would say too that they are a good family and in fact, a young woman who lives next door, close to them anyway, and says they are good neighbors.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER
SUBJECT: MASON, GRANGE, KING'S DAUGHTERS

Rick: Miss Sawyer, what do you recall of the organizations like the Masons and the Granges? Which was the most active, would you say?

Mary: Well I know about Masonry. I never knew much of anything about the Grange. Masonry goes back many, many years in the village. The first Lodge of Masons in the community was called Mt. Moriah Lodge. That broke up at the time of what is known as the Morgan case. Now I don't know all the details. I was brought up on this so that I heard a lot about it, but I don't know all the details. It was quite a scandal at the time and caused a great deal of trouble throughout the state in the Masonic Lodges. How long it was before the present Lodge was organized, I don't know but there were several years between. Probably in the forties, but it has been very active ever since then. As I say, I've heard Masonry from the time I could understand anything and as long as my father lived. He and his father and his grandfather were all members of this lodge, his great-grandfather, his grandfather my great-grandfather, and his grandfather was a member of the old Mt. Moriah Lodge. It was very active and I would say more active than the Grange group and I think it is a much older organization than the Grange, though I am not sure of that.

Rick: Did it add much to the social life of the town of Palmyra?

Mary: The Masonry did very much, particularly the branch called The Commandery-Zenobia Commandery. Every year they put on a great Ball and everybody went all out for this Ball. The ladies were all in evening dress, the gentleman in evening dress, The Knights Templar themselves in their uniforms, and a part of the affair was the drill put on by the Commandery members in uniform. I saw it once. I have a vague recollection, I probably was about thirteen when my parents took me to see it, and then I was taken home earlier. If you've ever seen the Commandery in uniform, you know it's a very impressive uniform. Have you ever seen it?

Rick: I can't say that I ever have, maybe on TV. I believe I've seen photographs.

Mary: You've seen photographs. They were dark blue uniforms, a tri-corn hat with a white ostrich plume and they made a handsome-looking group. They wore a leather belt, a chain with a sword attached. Some head medals on their coats, it was really very picturesque and they had a reputation of doing a marvelous job of drill. Then, of course, there was the dance, and

following that great fun went on. It was a lovely affair, a very beautiful affair. They also put on at New Year's time, a meeting for the benefit of the Palmyra King's Daughters-now that's not the library, that was the parent organization, the King's Daughter Society as it was known then, Kings Daughters Inc. as it is known now. The ladies put on a dinner beforehand. It was a paid affair and whatever they can make on the dinner went to them and then the Commandery gave them a purse of fifty dollars perhaps, perhaps more, I don't know. That was quite a social affair and following that there was a dance too, but a more informal affair than "The Commandery Ball" was. I would say that those were the main social events which they fostered. I never knew of anything of the sort being put on by the Graingers as a public affair. They have many parties and dances of their own following the regular meetings, I've understood, but more than that I can't tell you.

Rick: Were those the two main organizations-the Masons in the Grange? Were there any others?

Mary: The King's Daughters, of course, which was organized in 1887, I believe, but they were strictly a women's organization and a philanthropic organization. They took over that sort of work for the village. Besides that there was a village official who is called "The Poormaster" and he looked after the poor people. Anyone in need could appeal to him and he provided food, clothing, coal perhaps, whatever was needed, but that was strictly a village official. The King's Daughters Society went out into the town as well as here and I would say they did even more. They took on providing glasses, eyeglasses for needy children, things of that kind. I remember one time there was a child born with deformed feet and the King's Daughter Society became interested in or instrumental in seeing that that child was taken into a hospital and had surgery to correct the deformity. That was the sort of thing they did. There are two boys in high school now who have a very strange eye disease with very much impaired sight and they learned of a Philadelphia Ophthalmologist who operated for that thing very successfully and through the help of King's Daughters Inc., they went to Philadelphia and had the help and were fitted for the special lenses so that they now can even drive a car. They visited the last meeting of the King's Daughters Inc., the March meeting, and discussed the treatment down there and the help they received, and showed us the glasses. They look like ordinary glasses but with little lenses about an inch long which are attached to the eyeglass.