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INTERVIEW WITH MISS MARY N. SAWYER - 4/8/1980

CONDUCTED BY RICHARD VAIR, NANCY RUBERY, AND JOHN WEISS

SUBJECT: ENTERTAINMENT

John Weiss: Miss Sawyer, how did people spend their vacations? Did they go to Sodus Point or places like that?

Mary Sawyer: Some people went to Sodus Point. We went to Pultneyville when I was a very little girl. Oh, they took my baby carriage along. I was that little. Whether I was walking or not, I don't know, but I was still in a carriage. My parents rented rooms in a house down on the Main Street, which is now occupied by a Mrs. Helmbold. It stands behind the great cedar hedge, quite a tall cedar hedge. We went over there two or three summers when I was quite little. We went over by horse and carriage. We started out in the morning. Usually, a second Democrat wagon was used to carry the trunks. I remember standing in a window and watching them load the Democrat wagon one time.

Nancy Rubery: Yes. Was that an open wagon-Democrat wagon?

Mary Sawyer Sawyer: Yes. You'd call it a pickup truck today. It took much of the day to get there, but it was a nice drive. There were no paved roads, only dirt roads all the way. There was one section that was sandy and very, very dusty. We would go and spend a week or two. Then there were two summers, 1906 and 1907 when we went over two summers in succession. We had rooms in the house way up the street just as you make a turn onto Washington Street. When I was very young and we lived down in the Helmbold house and later, we had our meals at the old hotel. We walked up three times a day. The proprietor would come out and ring a great big bell. You can hear it all up and down the street. That was time the meal was served, and everyone would start out. We had our own table in ate what was served. There was no choice. In later years, in the day of the automobile, we used to drive over Sundays once in a while and have dinner there. There was never much sand. There was a Sandy Beach up at the West End. Then the section in the center of that Main Street was quite sandy. Now it's pretty much rocky all around. Now, of course, over the years the water has come up and eroded the land so that what was beach is water-covered practically. It's a very interesting old town. In the War of 1812, there

was a battle fought offshore. At least one house and I think two, had cannon balls in them. John Jack's brother lives in one house; they found the Cannonball and dug it out of the wall. They have it on their fireplace hearth now, which is desecration, I think. It should have been left in the wall. There is one of the Humboldt house, too, I'm quite sure. That was an historic house. It belonged to the Todd family. The sons eventually went into Rochester and established the Todd-Check Protec-a-Graph machine. I think none of the family are left in Pultneyville. They are all gone.

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SUBJECT: AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION - WAYNE COUNTY FAIR

John Weiss: What time of year was Palmyra most active? Was it in the spring, summer, fall, or winter? Or was it during the Fair?

Mary Sawyer: So far as people coming into the community from all around, it was during the time of the fair. Fourth of July might be a time when people came too. Because there was a great deal going on. There were parades and get-togethers, speeches, and that kind of thing. I would say that the fair time was when it was most active. And that was the last week in September at that time. Which really is better than August because the crops were at their height then. I haven't been to the fair, in a long, long time, so I don't know what the exhibits are. The last two or three times I was there, the exhibits of the fruits and vegetables particularly were very much curtailed. There was just very little at the time. The Midway was lively of course. All that kind of thing. The races. The animal exhibits now and in August are about as they were. The fruits, vegetables, and flowers are nothing now to what they used to be when it was in September. I have understood that the date was changed because for so many years in succession they ran into rainy weather, which of course was bad. But on the other hand, I can recall any number of Fair times in September when it was hot as hot can be. Uncomfortably hot up there in the old, dusty racetrack and Fair House.

Nancy Rubery: What about the races? Did they hold races at the fairgrounds? At other times, instead of just Fair times?

Mary Sawyer: I don't recall any other races at any other time than during the fair. They were all the Sulky Races. They were well patronized. There was a grandstand and it was always well filled. And there again, the horses and drivers came from miles around. They were good races for anyone that was interested in them. Personally, I wasn't interested and I didn't go. I did later. As I grew older, I used to go up with my parents, friends of theirs, and my own friends, but that was all.

Richard Vair: Were the races held for strictly entertainment value or was there any kind of wagering?

Mary Sawyer: I wouldn't say "strictly", mostly perhaps. I would suspect that there was somebody going on around somewhere. I don't believe that I saw any sign of it. I haven't a doubt but what it did go on. Among those who are inclined in that direction. There are usually a few around. But it was very largely entertainment.

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SUBJECT: POLITICS

John Weiss: What was local politics like? Was there active participation?

Mary Sawyer: Yes, Much more active participation than there is now, in general. Of course, from the beginning, it has been largely a Republican Community. My recollection is the Democratic party was not as active. They knew they were going to be beaten anyway, so they didn't bother. They didn't have any slate at all. I remember as long ago as when my father was alive, and active (it was in his later years, he perhaps was in his sixties) the Democrats got together and they did put up a slate. I remember my father saying that he was glad that they had done it because it made for a better feeling and better politics. From then on, I think, the Democratic Party has been more active. Sometimes, as you know, they have won seats in the local elections.

John Weiss: Do you remember local Town meetings, political meetings?

Mary Sawyer: No, I don't think we ever had Town Meetings, as such. I remember hearing about Caucus. That was the term that was used and still is. Now whether that is general in New York State, or not, I don't know. I've forgotten much of my civics that I knew, once upon a time. I never went to any of the caucuses. My father used to go years when he was active and interested. My brother-in-law was also interested and active. He, my brother-in-law, never held any offices in the village, but he was on the Republican Village Committee for quite a long time. But that was the extent of it, he was active in that sense.

John Weiss: I read in the old newspapers that the local farmers had a big say in what went on in local politics.

Mary Sawyer: I don't remember that. That was very likely. I was pretty young at that time, so I wasn't interested in probably wouldn't have observed it. I remember the 4th of July, and Memorial Day parades, and particularly the Fourth of July when we had firecrackers and torpedoes and fireworks in the evening, all those things, as well as the speeches. But I don't remember anything about the farmers.

John Weiss: It said that they were very active.

Mary Sawyer: I think that they were active.

John Weiss: They used to have spring elections, and they would come in. When they changed it to the fall, they couldn't participate.

Mary Sawyer: Of course, in the Fall their crops were fairly well in, so they could get out and get to the fair, and such.

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SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION - TROLLEY

Nancy: We come across frequent references to the trolley, and I was just wondering whether you remember any particular trips.

Mary: Yes, it was a great thing when the trolley went through Palmyra. I remember there was an old hotel in Newark, the Gardineer. It was quite the thing on Sunday to take the trolley around noon time, 12 or 1 or so, and go to Newark and have dinner at the Gardineer. And about the time we were through dinner, there was a westbound car coming, and people could take that and get back to Palmyra. I remember that very distinctly. If there was quite a bit of time to kill in between, and if the people had friends who lived nearby, they could walk a block or two and make a quick call. I don't know just how long it was before it went all the way through into Rochester. Like the canal, it was built somewhat in sections, so that one section would be completed before the other. I don't know where they started in the middle, that is the Palmyra area, and work in both directions, or if work was going on in other places too. I wasn't old enough to have any interest in it. It was a great thing, and you may remember a picture in the file that we had here, now in the Historic Palmyra Collection, of one of the trolleys up here on Main Street loaded with men and others hanging on the steps. It was the inauguration of the trolley, really.

One of the first long trips -I think that went almost to Rochester. In the beginning, the trolleys went into University Avenue and ended at Culver Road. There was a station there. The passengers then transferred from this Rochester, Syracuse, and Eastern line to the City Line, and went on into the city. When you're ready to come home, it was the reverse trip. You took a City Trolley out to Culver Road and met this trolley right there.

That was the case for quite a number of years finally, the cars went all the way into the city, right down Main Street. The old Lehigh Valley Railroad Station ultimately became the Rochester Terminus. When that was used the cars went in rather a roundabout way to get there. Many a time we had stood on the Main Street on the side across from Sibley's waiting for the eastbound Harley to come along. They ran in both directions just about every hour, so it was wonderful.

And when they discontinued it, it was a great loss. I feel it a great loss now because getting into Rochester is a major operation for me since I don't drive anymore. And of course, it was a car's Anonymous phone bills that put them out of business really, because so many people drove their own cars. In fact, I remember bringing my father down from Rochester 1 day, and as we approached the old stop 28 West of the village, the trolley came along and he turned to me and said, quotes Mary, we are what has the trolley out of business." That incident was just very few weeks before the end of the line.

Nancy: How far east did it go?

Mary: It went to Syracuse.

Nancy: All the way?

Mary: All the way to Syracuse eventually. I remember one trip, we were going into the Adirondacks. It was the summer of 1908. We went from Palmyra to Utica by trolley. We took this trolley from Palmyra to Port Byron, and that was about the end of it at that time. We transferred to a line that went from Port Byron over to Auburn. And as I recall, we took another trolley from Auburn to Syracuse. And then still another trolley to Utica. We spent the night there. In fact, we spent two or three days there in Utica, and then took the train up into the Adirondacks, and made a tour train up there, ultimately getting back here. As I recall we returned home from Albany to Palmyra on the train.

John: With the coming of the trolley and the automobile, did more people go out of town for shopping and entertainment or did they do a lot of shopping in town?

Mary: From my own experience, I would say yes, we did practically all of our shopping in Rochester, that is the big shopping. I remember my mother and I took a trip to Rochester one time for the express purpose of buying a spool of sewing silk. It was in the days of home dressmaking and home dressmakers. We could not match a particular material that was being worked on. We went to Story's store as it was then, and then over to Farnham's which was where Collie's is now. They didn't have it. It was an odd color to match. We did do other errands up there on that trip, but that was the main errand in Rochester at that particular trip.

The trolley was very much used to take people from Palmyra and Newark to Rochester for concerts and theaters. In later years, along in the twenties, I would say, after the New York season, the Metropolitan Opera Company made a tour and Rochester was on its schedule. That was after the Eastman Theater was built and a number of times we went up there to the Opera. The concerts were given earlier than that, in what we called Convention Hall. That, I don't know whether now or not, but in the war years, it was a center for a Naval Group. There were many concerts there. I'm not sure just what it was called. The first time I heard Paderewsky, it was in the old Convention Hall. Also Tettrazaini. You've probably never heard of those names.

Nancy: Wasn't Chicken Tettrazini named after her?

Mary: I wouldn't be at all surprised. She may have concocted a recipe. As I say, the theater, also known as the Lyceum was there. Then when the movie houses came in, it was convenient because the trolley scheduled its run so that there was the last trolley out of Rochester at around eleven-thirty, so that you could get home shortly after midnight. Many people went to the concerts, and to see plays, as well as Opera.

Nancy: So it took about thirty minutes?

Mary: I would say a little longer than thirty minutes, nearer three-quarters of an hour. They had what they called the locals and the express. I think that was not the term that they used. The Express trolleys went all the way through from station to station. Palmyra, Macedon, Egypt, Fairport, East Rochester, and Rochester. The Locals stopped at the crossroads in between, like Stop 28, and there was one stop up west of Macedon. These stops accommodate the country people.

Nancy: Canandaigua Road probably, or beyond.

Mary: Over in there. All those crossroads. Ayrault Road was another one where there was a stop. It was a great convenience.

Nancy: It would be wonderful to have it back.

Mary: Oh I wish to goodness it was, but I'm afraid not. I'm afraid we'll have to wait a while. There was the Rochester and Syracuse, I think it was called, and that went south from Rochester to Canandaigua and on to Syracuse. So the people had a choice really.

Nancy: Speaking of automobiles, you know that someone mentioned to me recently in Palmyra that there were two electric automobiles. Do you remember those?

Mary: Yes. Dr. McPherson had one and he used to trundle around the village in it. I can't think who had the other one.

Nancy: Was it Mrs. Garlock?

Nancy: It might have been. Mr. Garlock, O.J., had a regular gasoline car. But she may have had an electric also. I don't remember that.

There was also a Stanley Steamer, and that was quite a thing. It was the only one, I think, that Palmyra ever had. It was quite something. Every once in a while, it would run out of water and it would practically blow up with steam. Even after we moved down here onto Jackson Street, the couple that had it, Mr. and Mrs. Giese, were driving Jackson Street, and right up here by Helen Smith's house it blew up and the steam was all over. It was quite a sight to see.

Nancy: Now she was a Palmyra girl.

Mary: She was a niece of Mrs. Pliny T Sexton. Her maiden name, I think was Hyde. Lucy Hyde. And the Hyde house was the house up across from the old Sessions house where the Kirchoffs live. That was the Hyde house. It now is a double house that belongs to Otto's son. Whether her parents died or not, I'm not sure. But the Sextons brought her up. She lived with them practically all of her life, that I know about. When she was young, my parents were young. They were all in a general group together. They knew her. The Sextons cared for her, educated her, I believe sent her to Germany to study where she met her husband. Following his retirement from the German Army due to his extreme deafness, they came back to Palmyra and lived in the house where Diane and Ed Wheeler live-213 West Main. Mr. Sexton owned the house at the time.

