

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NESBITT - 12/04/1979

Conducted by RICHARD VAIR

(Richard Vair - "Please tell us what you remember of Cuyler Street with reference to Palmyra and Vicinity pp. 133-134.")

"I remember from the time I was a child there was a Cuyler Street. Do you want me to tell you what was on it?"

(Richard Vair - "Sure.")

"Pliny Sexton-you could tell his farms all over the country. He had so many. And he owned the Rogers' house. A very beautiful house with hedges and paths about the yard, surrounded by a fence. Doctor Trowbridge lived next door. He called Johnny Smith, a cartman, to remove a dead pig from his yard. Johnny asked 50cents to remove it and the doctor thought it too much and refuse to pay it. The next morning when he looked out the window, he saw the pig in the front yard."

"Soon after the year 1900, a group of women became interested in having a public library in Palmyra. They discussed it and decided to have each one bring books from home. But where to put them they had to decide. However, Mr. Pliny Sexton heard about their plans and offered them an empty store which he owned. It wasn't long before they had enough books to start a small Library. Which they did. It grew rapidly and they had to move to larger quarters. They did so when Mr. Sexton offered them the west side of what is now the Union Club Rooms. There they continued to grow until they moved across the street to the Menzo Davis Block. Sometime after a few years, Mr. Sexton died and willed the Palmyra King's Daughters the Carlton Rogers house on Cuyler Street. Also, he willed them money to help with his organizing a library there. And that was the beginning of the library in Palmyra."

"One way of helping financially was "tag day." That was when each member stood on a street corner handing out tags to people to pin their coats. Everyone helped most generously with that plan. Also, they served dinners at the Palmyra Fair."

"Mrs. Ziegler having been a member of the King's Daughters since it was started came to live in part of the lower floor. She used the large room at the north for her living room. The room that is now the Children's Room. The bedroom and bath were in the south part of the house. The rest of the house previously had been rented to two or three other families, one of which kept chickens in the rear of the house. I remember that. Eventually, they all moved out, leaving Mrs. Ziegler to help with the generous aid of Mr. Sexton, - to make arrangements for at least two apartments upstairs. Which helped by their rent. There we have the beginning of the library."

"Across the street was the roller skating rink where you skated to loud music."

“The Reformed Church was also near there. Also later a garage. You had to climb about ten steps to get into the church, but they finally sold it and built one on Canandaigua Street. That was the Dutch Reformed Church. I guess that's about all on the street. It was the street with new homes mixed in with the old homes which people like. There were several other houses built on Cuyler street, but they have changed hands so many times that it would be hard to remember who all the owners and renters might be.”

“I want to tell you about the stores. Cal Everson kept a shop on Market Street selling tobacco and so forth. J.H.L. Gallagher came from Buffalo, New York, and was hired by Mrs. Nichols to represent her in the share of interest in the Garlock Packing Company.

Samuel Hunt lived in Chicago many years and came back here to retire. He was born in the Cuyler home on the hill at the south end of Cuyler Street. His father, Mr. George Cuyler, built the house.

“Justa Spier's grandmother, Mrs. Pinkey came up on a canal boat with her family from New York and lived on Market Street. There was an epidemic of smallpox. I don't think it was ever recorded. She lived up here in my apartment. There was what they called a “pest house” on Hogback Hill Road where people went to combat the disease.”

“Every Sunday afternoon Mr. Pinkney walked to the Armington school and taught a Sunday School Class and then walked back home to 10 children. That's what they had.”

“Dr. McPherson's house and office were on East Main Street's north side, next to the Pliny Sexton house. Father of the Pliny Sexton we knew. He was a homeopathic and my mother always called him when my brother and I were sick because he gave sugar pills.”

“Dr. Hennessey had his office in the block over the Story's store.”

“Dr. Smith's office was in his home which was on the lot where the Zion Church has their Parish house.”

“Dr. Pierce had his office on East Main Street next to the Garlock Office. He stayed there only a short time and went into the service during World War 1.”

“Dr. Nesbitt had his office in his home as Dr. Trowbridge did before him. He also went into the service during World War 1.”

“Dr. Chase had his office next to the Presbyterian Church on Main Street. The house has since been torn down.”

“Dr. Marks had his dental office in the rooms over the present drug store, Johnson's. He lived at the upper end of Cuyler Street.”

“Dr. North’s offices were over Rushmore's Drugstore for many years.”

“And they all made night calls. Doctors now won't.”

(Richard Vair - “What do you recall about Mr. VanAlstine?”)

“Mr. VanAlstine-he worked for the Garlock Packing Company. He was a wonderful pen man. They lived up on Main Street. I know who taught his daughters in school, first grade. He also worked for Pliny Sexton in the bank. But he liked to trace back different families.”

“There was a Mr. Lakey here in town. He was a whaler. I have a copy of his log. He was gone two years, about. Can you imagine that? It's really fascinating.”

“Mr. VanAlstine was a historian, I'd say.”

(Richard Vair - “Do you recall any canal stories?”)

“My grandfather was a carpenter on that carpenter boat, along with Mr. Harmon.”

“There was a grocery store run by Mr. Cleveland. It was down on Canal Street. His property ran all the way down to the canal. They used to get off the boat there and buy groceries from Mr. Cleveland.”

“(Richard Vair - “Do you know what year the Palmyra Directory was published? The Directory that has all the stores and shops listed in it?”)

“I can't remember, and I was born in 1892. So I'd say the early 1900s.”

“(Richard Vair - “What do you recall of Carlton Rogers?”)

“Carlton is the one who lived next door to us on Cuyler Street. He built a beautiful Memorial Chapel over in the cemetery. It's beautiful. It's where you drive in. He gave it to the Village.”

(Richard Vair - “Do you remember anything about a Miss Eaton?”)

“Oh yes. Her father was Horace Eaton, the minister. She was on the school board. I can remember when I was in school, her wheeling her mother up and down the street. They lived over Hart Pearce's where the law offices are now. Her father was minister of the Presbyterian Church. She was a wonderful woman, teacher.”

(Richard Vair - “That's about all I have to ask you. Is there anything you want to add?”)

“My grandfather was in the Civil War. When he came home they started a Legion. They called it the James A Garfield Post. It was down on Main Street up above one of the stores. And this friend of mine-Mary Ella Fraher - and I used to go down to the post room. My grandfather went there every afternoon. They played cards and visited. They had an organ. One day a couple of the old fellows came down-must have been after I was married because I lived up on Foster Street before I was married and asked if I wanted the organ. I was flabbergasted. I said, why? Well, they said, we've been talking it over, and there's only a few of us left, and we know you used to come down and play on it. So would you like that organ? And I said sure. So that's how I got the organ.”

“They used to have banquets up there in their Post Rooms. I can still see my mother with big tin pans-milk pans I think they were full of scalloped oysters Mary Ella and I would go up and wait on the tables for them.”

“They'd always invite whoever was president of the village and different ones they knew for the dinner. They always invited Mary Sawyer's father-Judge Sawyer and some other men who were interested.”

“I've always been interested in anything that's historical. Somebody told me once that Nellie Hart-they lived over there where the post office is - married Tom Birdsall who lived next door. Nellie told me there was quite a large brook that came down past where they lived, south of Palmyra.”

“Bob Hart was in the Civil War, too. He was a semi-invalid in later years, and he used to sit over in his yard. I'd go over and visit him. Their home is where the post office now stands. My grandfather would visit him, too. My grandfather had to be in his 80s or 90s. He died when he was 91. I thought it was quite interesting.”