

Interview with Miss Mary and Sawyer - 10/30/79
CONDUCTED BY NANCY RUBERY (LIBRARIAN)

In response to a question about library tours: " To start with, I had a little different system whether I was conducting adults or children through. With the adults, I tried to take them into various rooms. The main room, the reference room, and the children's room and explain where the various books were-fiction, non-fiction, reference, the usual things. And the same in the children's room. I usually either started or ended the tour in the parlor as it was then. I called their attention, particularly to the things which were in the original house: the chandeliers which were originally gas but had been electrified, and the gilt cornices over the windows-which are not there now-and also the little gold molding up against the ceiling. All these things were in the house in the beginning. And then of course the various pieces of furniture which were of interest to people. So far as I could, I would tell them where they came from. Which families they were from. The Eaton bookcase-Doctor Eaton was a longtime Presbyterian Minister here. You probably heard the name as an outstanding family. That was about it with the adults and with the older children."

"Then when I have the little children, and for quite a long time we used to get visits from the first and second and sometimes the third grades. They were not interested in the other parts of the house so much, but I did try to tell them where they could find their books, and particularly about caring for the books: keeping their hands clean and putting the books back where they found them. I used to tell them that every book had its own home on the shelves and it had to go back home, just as they had to go back home when they were through school. That always brought a smile to their faces. I took the older children and girl scouts and groups of children into the parlor, too. But the very little ones I didn't take in there so much. Not until they were old enough to come with a girl scout or perhaps a 4-H group or something of that sort. That was about the extent of the tour. Sometimes there were questions to answer, but not too many. Except the children usually had lots of questions about things, what they were for, etc., and I was interested in that. Then after Mrs. Ziegler was gone we took the children into what was her bedroom to see the other historic things that we had, particularly the Civil War guns and swords-that sort of thing."

(Nancy Rubery - " By that you mean the room that is now the office?")

"Yes. The room that is now the office. And that made a very good room for that purpose. If they were interested in the costumes we would take them upstairs and point out the choice ones. The girls used to get a great kick out of the hats. The boys, of course, the guns in the swords and such other historic things as we had, the Civil War things."

" You asked about the librarians, too. Unless you had something else that you wanted to mention."

(Nancy Rubery - "Oh, no. I especially wanted to hear what you would recalled of Mrs. Ziegler and of the librarians.")

"The first librarian - I think - was a Miss Mulendyke; Miss Marie Mulendyke. She was a daughter of the Pastor of the Reform Church at the time. They were here quite a long time. I didn't go to the library when she was there but I remember seeing her and hearing Pru Warner mention her, because the Mulendykes at the time were across the street neighbors of the Warners, and they knew them."

"The first librarian I remember and who was the librarian when I first went in and who issued my first borrower's card, was Miss Mary Aldrich. She was a native of Palmyra, as was her father. Her mother came from Marion. They lived way up the end of the Main Street - the house which is up on the hill at the very end of the street. The corner of what is now known as Burnham Heights. That was the Aldrich house."

(Nancy Rubery - "The large yellow house?")

"The great big yellow house up on the bank. How long she was librarian, I don't know. She went to Geneseo and took the library course. From Geneseo she went to the Pratt Library in Brooklynn and was there - I think - all the rest of her working life. Her mother ultimately went down and made her home with her."

(Nancy Rubery - "Do you mean that she may have been librarian in Geneseo? In the village?")

"No. She was not at Geneseo Library. She went in for the Library Course. She went to the normal school as it was then and took her training. That was her field apparently, and I have a feeling she went directly from her course at normal school down to Brooklynn, but I wouldn't be sure of it."

"Then there was Miss Harriet Corson, who lived here in Palmyra and it was her that Pru first went to work with. I don't know that Pru was actually her assistant, but she went in as a high school girl and worked with her, and really took most of her training under Miss Corson. And from what Pru used to tell me, she was a good teacher and a very particular one. So that Pru was quite particular about a great many things. And she used to mention Miss. Coron. "I had to do such and so when Miss Corson was here."

"The family - after the mother was gone - moved West. There were four or five sisters in the family. One married and remained here, the others all went to California and lived out the rest of their lives."

"And then another Palmyra girl went in as librarian. She too was a graduate of Geneseo normal. That was Esther Westfall. She was here in the library until she married. Pru worked with her also."

(Nancy Rubery - "So Miss Warner stayed through the Corson and Westfall times?")

“Yes. When Esther left, her mother came in as librarian. And Mrs. Westfall was the librarian - I noticed in our file - 17 years. She was very much loved by all the people who went in to the library. She was a quiet person. She had some training, but mostly short sessions, I took it, from what Prudence said. Ultimately, she was certified as was Prudence when the law changed which made it necessary for a librarian to be certified. They had to take some sort of test-submit answers to a questionnaire, apparently, and it was called a prior service certificate. That is they had served in the library for a certain number of years and with that and the answers to the questionnaire which they turn into the state, they were granted a certificate.”

(Nancy Rubery-” So their experience counted for something?”

“Their experience counted a great deal. I don't know just what the percentage was, but it was a great deal. And both of them-both Mrs. Westfall and Prudence-received their certificates at that time period following Mrs. Westfall's death, Prudence was made the librarian and it was then that I went in as her assistant. I had worked several years when we had a call from one of the state representatives. I had no training except what Pru could give me. That is library training. And such College training as I had which granted me a bachelor's degree. The first thing Mrs. Ziegler asked me when I went to apply was do you have a degree? I could answer yes. That is what gave me the job in the first place. Well, this represented told Mrs. Ziegler and Pru she felt that there was a possibility of changes still coming in the law and she advised me that I get some form of Library training. And it was the next summer, 1947, that I went to Geneseo to the six-week summer course, and then submitted my credits to the state and was granted a certificate which help good for the rest of the time. At first, it was valid in all communities up to a population of 5000. Later that changed too, but it was still valid. Then some years after I went to summer school sessions, I went up again to a two-week workshop shop on book selection. It primarily was divided into three groups as I remember children's reading, adult reading, and what was called reluctant readers, that is the children who didn't like to read who needed help in reading. That was the group that I was assigned to and was helpful I found. So that was my library training.

Then of course, at Prudence's death, I was appointed librarian and the assistance came in. I had two-Mrs Henry who is with me for a while; Becky Komer was with me for a while - and then Patty Nash came in. I hope she's going to be there with you a good long time.”

(Nancy Rubery-” Oh, indeed I do hope so. Tell me something now about Mrs. Ziegler. Was she chairman of the board?”)

“Mrs. Ziegler was a member of King's Daughter's for years. King's Daughters, Inc. that is. She came out to the board of Library trustees quite early. When I first went to the library she was the treasurer. There was a shift later and Mrs. Rumrill became president. Mrs. Ziegler was treasurer for quite some time. But then she ultimately became vice president when Mrs. Rumrill moved up. She was always very much interested in the library. Of course, her great interest was the historical branch, and it was she who organized that museum and work so hard toward it. She lived in the house for a time. She had the south side - what is now the main library room. Which

was two rooms originally. What is now your non-fiction room, which I still think of as the reference room was her kitchen. And then, as I had said, her bedroom and the bathroom were in back. Then when the library moved, she of course had to move out of that front part. It was then in that changing over the parlor was put in condition and she used that as her living room and as a museum room. She worked very, very hard toward it. It was a good thing that she had lived in the building because she had dreamed for years of the library moving into the house, which they own for many years ever since Mr. Sexton's death in 1924 when he willed the house to the library. She had drained, as I say, of what could be done-of what might be done and had some very good ideas as to how to go about making the changes into a library. And I think it was her idea to put that parlor into condition, which she had been interested in. It was a storeroom really for many, many years. Things that had been brought to the museum-no place to put it typing was in there. But the main Museum broom was the very front of what is now the main library room."

(Nancy Rubery - "I'm not sure that I understand that correctly. What is now our main reading room was once museum? And was that immediately after Mrs. Ziegler lived there, or while she lived there?"

"It was while she lived there."

(Nancy Rubery - "But when the library took over that space, then the things were moved?"

"It moved across the hall to the parlor. I'm sorry I didn't make that clear."

(Nancy Rubery - "I think you did, but I just wanted to be sure that I understood."

"What is your main room was two rooms and I think I said that before. There was a partial partition between at the center. Our intention - her intention - was to take that whole partition out and make it one great big room. But when they got to it, they found the chimney went from cellar to attic. Of course, they had to stop right there, which was all right. Pru and I liked it because it gave us the big benefit of that closet in back, which had been in the Rogers' day a dish closet, sort of pantry effect. It made an excellent magazine room for us, and it was very helpful so that it wasn't a bad feature at all. But sometimes we had to crane our necks around the corner, but it worked out very well.

(Nancy Rubery - "I'm often asked about the original house and people are various to know which rooms were used for which purposes. If that was a dish closet or pantry, does that indicate that the dining room was there?"

"The original dining room is what is now your fiction room. What was the children's room in my day. That was the original dining room. For some reason or other, I understand, Mister Rogers did not like it as a dining room and he had the dining room moved into the back part of what is now your main room, which when the partition was there Mrs. Ziegler really used as her living room. I think, from what Mrs. Ziegler said,(what she got from a still older woman, a Mrs. Birdsall

who knew the family quite well, and who at one time lived in the house temporarily) that the closet was there. Now whether it was an extra dish closet or not, I don't know. But I think from what she said, it was there in the beginning. After the Rogers' were gone - the house was used as apartments. There were two families I know that live there. Mrs. Julius Phelps' family, the Aldrich Family, lived in the house. Now that family is not connected with the Mary Aldrich Family. There may have been a connection way, way back, but they were two distinct families. They live there in an Ostrander family lived in the house also. And which apartment, I don't know. Then after it came into possession of the library trustees, they had one apartment upstairs on the south side and also a back apartment downstairs which is your fiction room, and the work rooms back, and that way back bedroom upstairs which you now use as a work room for book mending."

"Then still later Mr. and Mrs. Parsons wanted to give up their big house and the trustees converted the north side of the house upstairs into an apartment also. The apartment that Miss Flynn now has."

(Nancy Rubery - "Which was vacant until that time?")

That was vacant until then. When Mrs. Ziegler's children had bedrooms up there, they were not apartments at all, but they used a couple of the rooms as bedrooms. Marge was married and took over Mrs. Ziegler's house where Miss Marge was born. The house up on the corner of Cuyler and Charlotte Avenue

(Nancy Rubery - "Well, it has a long history. Of course, the use of rooms has changed.")

"Changed from time to time. After the library took it over, of course, it was changed very much."

(Nancy Rubery - "Why did the library trustees delay-if they had the right to the building in 1924, why did they delay moving until 1946?")

"Well a little politics, I think. You know, there is politics in all things. The president of the library was very much opposed to it. Her idea was that it would be of no use to the library. It could not possibly be made usable for a library. And the only use it could have would be by the school. And that it should be sold to the school lock, stock, and barrel. But the others did not approve of it. Now, whether the subject was ever broached to the school and turned down, I do not know, but the thing just stayed as it was. They got a little reserve from it, from the rental of the apartments, but that was all. So the thing just rode along. The building which the library occupied on Main Street, the south side of Main Street, which was owned by Mr. Sexton, had to be vacated because the building was sold. They moved over into the village building on the north side of the street, in what are still, I think, Girl Scout rooms. It was just a stopgap and they were most inadequate. From there the library moved across the street into the building where the flower shop now is, where we were until Henry Griffith so that building. Then we move down into the big house, the Rogers Place. But the thing just couldn't be worked out there and the other trustees didn't want to fight it, I guess. I know there was a delay family misses westfall's

death before anything was done about appointing a library in Miss Jackson, who had been an excellent president and who was the life of it, really, as long as possible, was ill in a nursing home. And she was in such a condition, I take it, but they didn't want to bring her into it and upset her and so on. So Prudence ran the Library from October to May and it was not until the May meeting which came out about a month following Miss Jackson's death that they were able to act freely according to their consciences. In the meantime, I made my application shortly after Miss Westfall's death. Others had applied, also. It was following the May meeting that the Trustees appointed Prudence as librarian, and came to me with the information that they had appointed me as her assistant. That was the answer to that."

(Nancy Rubery - What do you know about the genealogy files?)

"I don't know anymore, probably, than you know. We're indebted to Mrs. Sanford VanAlstine for all of that, most of it anyway, and Mrs. Ziegler, too, because she did help. He instituted it-Mr. Sanford Van Alstine - years and years ago. There was a historical society organized and I think he was the moving spirit of that, but he and his family moved to Rochester and the thing died out. There was nobody, probably, to carry it on. I don't know that that is so, but that is my guess. But all during that time, he had been working on old newspapers, gleaning bits of information-marriages, deaths, births, people who had moved away, all that sort of thing and put them on 3 by 5 file cards so that he had quite a lot of them. He took it all with him to Rochester. He also had cut out newspaper articles, I suppose from more or less different current papers, and pasted them onto sheets. Following his death, Mrs. VanAlstine turned all of that material over to Mrs. Ziegler. And that is the way it happened to come to the library."

(Nancy Rubery - "Thank goodness it did.")

"And thank goodness it did because it has been of invaluable assistance to dozens and dozens of people. The bound newspapers came from Mr. Sexton's estate, I understand. Some of them they had bound right there in the library. Some he had had bound and you can tell which had been professionally bound. During the Depression years, they had a bookbinding project here. I don't know how many people worked on it, but there were several who were trained. And there is one woman, a Mrs. Rush, who was quite adept at it. And it was she who did all of our later papers. After I came into the library, she was working on them. Following Mrs. Rush's death, Prudence did the binding."

(Nancy Rubery - "Did she do the binding right there in the library?")

"Yes. Right in the library."

(Nancy Rubery - "That accounts for that marvelous marvelous collection of equipment that we have.")

"Yes. Yes, it was all purchased during that time. In fact, I think the library was the seed of training school, there in the Griffith building, where the library was then. They moved over there

in the spring of 1932, just at the start of the Depression years. That, I think, is about all I know about it. “

“I do know that the book booklet of statistics which to me is a Bible, and again was gleaned from the old newspapers, was done by June Chase Crider. She was not at all well at the time. They lived over in the Martin Harris Farm, and Doris Smith - Doris Nesbitt - and June were school friends. And Doris was on the board. Whether it was June's idea or Doris's idea, I don't know. Possibly it was Mrs. Ziegler's idea. But Doris used to take the bound newspapers over to June and she went through them and compiled that list - marriages, deaths, and so on - so that we have that. And you have had it continued now in the later months”.

(Nancy Rubery - “We're working on the 1890s at the moment. The wonderful thing about both the file and the Crider index is that they established a pattern for us to follow. All we have to do was to continue.”)

“Continue that system. I know that has been a great deal of help.”

(Nancy Rubery -” In those files, now, in the large file folders in the drawers, I find many paper-bound papers on various subjects that say” Palmyra Historical Society” on them. Who prepared those papers?”

“Mr. VanAlstine, I think. Now there are some things there I think Mrs. Ziegler did, perhaps at a later date. But the start was from Mr. VanAlstine. I know one other file which was sent by Mrs. Harry Young, Adelaide Young. She was a great genealogist. And Mrs. Ziegler was very anxious to get the Swift genealogy. She turned it over to Adelaide Young who was as near a professional genealogist, I think, as we had here in Palmyra. She did that. It has been of infinite help to me personally because John Smith's wife was Rhoda Sawyer. Although we are not a direct line, we are from the same Captain Thomas Sawyer, who is the first to come into this country in Massachusetts.” And I have used it two or three times. In fact, I have a copy of it. I took a Xerox copy of it, too. So that has helped me. Rhoda Sawyer came down from one son of Captain Thomas. So there I have it all right down. That, as I say, has been of infinite helped me from time to time, and very likely will again. But that is the source of that file.

(Nancy Rubery - “I do wish that they had not been so modest. It would be nice if they had signed their papers.”

Yes, yes I think so. Now, I think that Sawyer and Swift's paper Adelaide or her name is on it. Possibly Mrs. Ziegler put it in. A good many of them should be. And definite dates, too. That would have been helpful. There was one in here in the Palmyra Library file on the move from the Girl Scout rooms across to the Griffith building. It's in two sections. On one side Mrs. Ziegler had written-penciled in the date 1932, with a question mark. On the other side, I know that 1932 is correct. I did not erase the question mark. But I wrote in on the other side 1932. I remember definitely that that was the date. Not from the library move, but from the taking over by the Girl

Scouts of those rooms. I happen to know that because I was active at the time and still had the troop.”

(Nancy Rubery - “You had a troop yourself?”)

“Yes. I started in 1926. I have the truth about 8 years I think or 9 years. And then I was off a year or 2 or 3 and went back on the council and served there for quite a long time, too. It was when I had the troop we made the move into the village building and for a couple of years after that. Yes, I have quite a lot of little girl scouts around. They're all grown up with Girl Scouts of their own, and boy scouts.”

(Nancy Rubery - “What do you recall about Mr. Sexton?”)

“I think Mr. Sexton was a native Palmyran His father was a banker and he went - Pliny T - into the bank with his father. I think probably, I should make clear the distinction. They were both Plineys. The father was Pliny Sexton. The son was Pliny Titus Sexton. And around here we usually speak of him as Piny T. So that there is the distinction in that way.”

“He was a very active man, very much interested in all things in the village. I don't know that he was a village official, but he kept a finger on all things that went on. He was civic-minded. He did a great deal for the village. He bought up a great deal of property around the village. He owned half of Main Street at that time he died, several buildings and other buildings around the town. Over the years he made considerable money and was very generous with his money in many, many ways. He was married but had no children of his own. They did bring up a niece of Mrs. Sextons. Her name was Lucy Hyde, but when she went to live with the Sextons she took the name of Sexton so that I remember her as being mentioned as Lucy Sexton. She married a German army officer by the name of Geise, Mr. Han's Giese. He became very deaf and had to retire. They moved back here to Palmyra and lived in the house which Mr. Sexton owned, which is now owned by Diana and Ed Wheeler. The house is at 213 West Main Street. Following her death, Mr. Giese went to California to live and remained there.”

“Mr. Sexton, as I said earlier, did a great deal for the library from the very outset. Mrs. Ziegler mentions that in an article she wrote which is in the file. That may be where I saw it. She helped them very, very much to get established. When they move from the Tripp Block where they established the reading room, he gave them the use of the first floor of a building which now houses the Western Auto store. He also gave them their heat and light and Mrs. Ziegler told me one time that he gave them the first book, which was a dictionary. He also later saw to it that they had books and helped them financially in many, many ways. He was particularly fond of children. And every year for a long time provided shoes for the needy children of the community. They went to him and he told them what they had to do to get an order for shoes. That was to sign their name in a book. Then he gave them an order to the shoe store and they went and got their shoes. He told my father an interesting story one time. They had to make their shoes last a certain time period, and he checked on it when they came. One time a little girl went to him and asked for new shoes. He checked his book and found that it was not time for her to have new

shoes. She had to go another month or two. She was very much disappointed. It was obvious that she was broken-hearted. So he inquired into the situation. She told him that her mother had said if she could get new shoes, she would have her picture taken. So he said, "Very well, if you will bring me one of the pictures you may have an order for new shoes." And of course, she got the order and he in time got the picture. He was very much pleased. But that was the kind of man he was."

(Nancy Rubery - "Did he use the library himself?")

"I don't think so."

(Nancy Rubery - "You know the library had remarkable circulation in those early days. The tremendous amount of use.")

"For the size of the library. I'll tell you one thing, during the Depression years Pru told me that their circulation boosted tremendously. People out of work, little money to go to the movies, the usual entertainment, that sort of thing. So the circulation went sky high. Then when the Depression was over it slowed again."

(Nancy Rubery - "Well, I've often wondered who used the library? Would you say that it was fairly evenly distributed? Or was it mostly mothers and children?")

"I think children and their mothers mostly. We had a few regular men customers, but I think that mostly the woman. One thing that Mrs. Parsons told me was that before they ever started it as a lending library, various women, members of The King's Daughters, went about the community discussing the question with various outstanding people of the community. What their idea was, the feasibility of it, that kind of thing. And she was delegated to go and call on Judge McLouth; Agnus Griffith's and Charles McLouth's father. He did not approve of it, she told me. In those days people built up their own libraries more. Most everybody had a fairly good-sized home and had room for libraries. And he felt they should establish their own. And he didn't approve of a public library. Didn't advocate it, anyway. I don't know that he actually disapproved, but then he went on said he didn't think it would go very well. But then he said to her at the end, "If anybody can make it a go, the King's Daughters can." So that was his feeling in the matter, and of course, it was well worthwhile, anyway. I remember when I first came home with library books, my father scolded me."

(Nancy Rubery - "Really!")

"I shouldn't be going to the library. I had plenty of books right around our own shelves. I should be reading those. And I always had books of my own. I think I never wrote a letter to Santa Claus that I didn't ask for books, and had them. But reading was the last resort for me until I was quite a big girl. I was just more interested in action. I remember his scolding me, that I should be reading the books on our own shelves rather than public library books. But he as a young man was interested in reading, and began doing what many people did-establish their own library. In

fact, we were driven out of the house down here and Washington Street where the Mulligan's live to the house on Jackson Street, primarily to accommodate the library.”