

(An interview with Mabel McCagg Webster '22, the interviewer is Charlie Cowling, archivist & librarian, College at Brockport. The interview was done in 1991.)

Interviewer: This is an interview with Mabel Webster, summer 1991. She was graduate of the class of 1922.

Now maybe we can try again. [inaudible 00:00:12] If you could start again telling about being born in Garland and... You can start anytime.

Mabel Webster: I was born in Garland, which is about three miles from Brockport on May 23, 1904. I have four brothers. My mother and father - my mother was Libby Adams before she married Harry McCagg. I had four brothers. One of them is living. He is 95 years old. Louis McCagg, and still lives in Garland. I went to the Garland Church, a Methodist church, and I still do. I lived in Brockport.

I went to school, the little school right across from the church until I was in the sixth grade. Then I went to Brockport for grammar school. Then when I was in the sixth grade in grammar school I went into the [inaudible 00:01:07] which taught the first year of high school so when I went over to the high school I was a sophomore to start with because I had first and second year Latin, no the first year Latin and algebra before I went into high school.

I had finished some Caesar and Cicero I guess. Then after algebra there was advance algebra, and I've forgotten most of the other subjects.

Interviewer: When you went from the grammar school to the Normal School training school, when was that? In eighth grade?

Mabel Webster: When I was eighteen. I was eighteen when I graduated from grammar school.

Interviewer: From high school.

Mabel Webster: I went to high school when I was sixteen and then I went to Normal. It must have been I was seventeen when I entered Normal.

Interviewer: I see. Tell us a little bit about the farm you grew up on.

Mabel Webster: It was twenty-seven acres. Seven acres on the north side of the ridge and twenty on the south side. My father planted cherry trees and peach trees and apple trees. We raised two cows and two horses and two pigs.

We had food for the winter. We raised all the vegetables that we would need. My mother canned and didn't need to buy many groceries. We bought one sack of flour and one sack of sugar. We had chickens so we had their eggs and milk and butter.

Interviewer: You didn't go to the store very much?

Mabel Webster: No. My father would take a load of cabbage to [Bart Barton [00:02:59], pick up a ton of coal, bring it back. They'd trade things that way. We raised potatoes sometimes. One year we sent the potatoes to Buffalo, I remember.

Interviewer: There was a kind of a barter sometimes? He'd trade cabbage for coal or those things.

Mabel Webster: Yeah we did. We did on the coal I guess. That was the only thing we traded. [inaudible 00:03:24] What did we do for wood...?

Interviewer: Did you have a wood lot?

Mabel Webster: No, I was trying to think. No, there was no wood lot. I don't know what we did do for wood. There was no garbage those days. We burned everything that would burn and whatever we couldn't eat we gave to the pigs or chickens.

Interviewer: That worked out pretty well.

Mabel Webster: [inaudible 00:03:46] all except the tin cans. We had to load them up once a year and take them to somebody else's woods.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Mabel Webster: And dump them. That was the extent of the garbage.

Interviewer: What about the horses? You were telling me before about driving the horse into Brockport.

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. There were no buses in those days, of course. I don't remember just what year they did start the buses, do you?

Interviewer: No, I don't know.

Mabel Webster: We either had to walk or ride a bicycle or drive a horse and buggy.

Interviewer: Did you have a bicycle?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. I have one older brother, he was the youngest of the brothers, but he had to go to school. He was five years older than I was so until he graduated he and I would go together.

After that, the neighbors would pick the person that's got the oldest horse and then we pooled our rides with the horse and buggy or horse and cover. There were pretty cold winters. [inaudible 00:04:36] it was a windy spot, you'd put rugs in the cover and sometimes put a lantern under the rope to keep our feet warm.

It's a wonder we didn't tip over and catch fire. Because the pitch-hold in the road, you probably don't know about that.

Interviewer: No.

Mabel Webster: The snow would pile up in streets like snow banks and you'd go over one and under [inaudible 00:04:55].

Interviewer: Oh I see.

Mabel Webster: It was lots of fun but I wouldn't want to do it again.

Interviewer: You were telling me about soap stones.

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. Took soap stones to bed with us. They were big, square, flat - about a foot square - and we put them on the back of the stove in the day time and then at night we'd have something warm to take to bed with you.

Interviewer: Oh wow. Where did you put the horse up when you came to Brockport?

Mabel Webster: Where did I what?

Interviewer: What did you do with the horse when you got to Brockport?

Mabel Webster: You know where the Municipal building is?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mabel Webster: That was the drive barn.

Interviewer: On State Street?

Mabel Webster: Yeah. We'd bring the horse and buggy and a man would tie him up and feed him something at noon. When we'd come in from school he'd bring the horse out and paid him a dollar a week, I think it was, to do that.

Interviewer: He'd take the harness off the horse and then-

Mabel Webster: I don't think. He might have taken the bridle off, but I don't think he ever took anything more off.

Interviewer: You had to do that yourself?

Mabel Webster: I could, but I didn't have to when my brother was around.

Interviewer: Oh.

Mabel Webster: But after he [inaudible 00:05:59] it was on my own.

Interviewer: So you had kind of a carpool then, you and some of the neighbors would share a horse and...

Mabel Webster: Yeah.

Interviewer: I see. Why did you use the oldest horse?

Mabel Webster: [inaudible 00:06:11]

Interviewer: You said that you would take the oldest horse to use to go to town with.

Mabel Webster: Oh just an old horse was safe to drive.

Interviewer: I see.

Mabel Webster: My neighbor had an old retired racehorse.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Mabel Webster: That was a lot of fun. Another horse went up and back and I'd get to school on time that day.

Interviewer: At that time, that was how everyone would travel was with the horse.

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. There were no cars in town. I forgot what time the cars came on. Not until I was in high school I don't think.

Interviewer: How late were people still driving horse and buggy into town and that kind of thing?

Mabel Webster: We drove them into town until I was married in 1929.

Interviewer: It was still common then to see people...

Mabel Webster: You could see them I guess. People at that time, they had cars.

Interviewer: So by the 1930s it was not that common anymore?

Mabel Webster: No. I don't remember when they started school buses. It must be in the late thirties or early forties.

Interviewer: I'm not sure myself. I think some time in the thirties when they consolidated the schools.

Mabel Webster: I think it was about then.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the training school, the high school? The teachers and so on.

Mabel Webster: The training school was in the first building to go to eighth grade and we would be assigned in our senior year we would be assigned a class for one semester. Just one class a day you could take a whole class for one subject.

We had a little experience. We'd have to write lesson plans. I remember there was, they were first to do and then preparation and then the main part and then the conclusion. Every time, every lesson that you taught.

The real teacher was in the room the whole time so observed and would criticize afterwards on what you did and didn't do right.

Interviewer: When you went to the high school as a student, do you think there was a lot of homework? Did they work you pretty hard?

Mabel Webster: Well, it was all business. There wasn't much fooling around. We had basketball and volleyball at gym. Basketball games, but I don't think they competed with other schools. It was just among themselves, choose up sides and do that.

We had domestic science once [inaudible 00:08:46], either sewing or cooking.

Interviewer: Which did you take?

Mabel Webster: You had to have both of them in different semesters. I turned out to be a better sewer than I was a cook.

The windows in the auditorium, they were donated by the classes. They would put on a play once a year - just amateur, you know - and raise money to provide a stained glass window. When they come to install them to the new college they put them in backwards so you can't read the dates. If you can read backwards, you can read them.

Interviewer: Yeah, they're beautiful windows.

Mabel Webster: They are beautiful.

Interviewer: We have them up in the library.

Mabel Webster: Yeah, I've seen them there. I'd like to know how much they cost. We had some put in the church in 1921 [inaudible 00:09:39] and they cost about \$40 a piece and they were just about the same size and shape. I bet now they'd be \$400.

Interviewer: Oh, much more. They're very expensive. What do you remember about the Normal School, being a student there?

Mabel Webster: Things were very formal. The teachers all called us mister so-and-so or miss so-and-so.

Interviewer: Who was your favorite teacher?

Mabel Webster: I liked Miss Yale. A lot of people couldn't get along with her but... I know my favorite one was my Spanish teacher, Miss Martin. I had a cousin that taught the Latin by the name of Sherman Smith.

Interviewer: He was an instructor at the school?

Mabel Webster: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh.

Mabel Webster: He taught history and Latin. Then there was Miss Edwards who was an English teacher. [inaudible 00:10:31] and Miss Loris. Everyone was scared to death of her.

Interviewer: What did she teach?

Mabel Webster: She taught the geometry at one point. Then the librarian was Miss Reynolds. We used to call her Jenny Wren. She was a little old lady with gray hair.

Interviewer: You mean wren like a bird?

Mabel Webster: Yeah. And I remember the stairways. They were iron circular staircases.

Interviewer: In the library?

Mabel Webster: In the library. They were something. They were (un?)usual. One day I went up to do some research work and I lost track of the time and got locked in. It was noon and that old lady was going home for dinner and so I had to stay until she got back at one o'clock before I could get out.

Interviewer: So you were locked in?

Mabel Webster: I did a lot of research, then.

Interviewer: Being a librarian, I'm interested in the college library. What do you remember about using the library back then? Were the hours...

Mabel Webster: You could go anytime you had a free hour.

Interviewer: So it was open all day?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah except at noon. It was closed from twelve to one. I'd never forget that I guess.

Interviewer: You could go and look at the books yourself or did she go and get them?

Mabel Webster: If you couldn't find what you wanted she'd help you. I can't remember, I think we had to buy our own books. Nowadays, aren't they [inaudible 00:11:55]?

Interviewer: No they have to buy them.

Mabel Webster: You have to buy them the same. Then we'd trade them in. [inaudible 00:12:02]

Interviewer: Yeah, they still do the same things with textbooks and class books. Was the library open in the evening?

Mabel Webster: I think so. No, just during school hours.

Interviewer: Just school hours.

Mabel Webster: Mmhmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: What do you remember about Miss Reynolds? Did she instruct you on using the library?

Mabel Webster: Well, everything was pretty well organized. She'd tell us where they would be and you could find them.

Interviewer: At that time, she was the only librarian.

Mabel Webster: Just the one, for sure. You didn't have any of these machines or computers or stuff like that. You had to be very quiet. She was very strict about any talking in the library.

Interviewer: Getting back to the teachers, I've heard different people talk about Miss Yale. Was she kind of a character?

Mabel Webster: Alice Yale? Yeah she was quite a character but we all liked, I liked her anyway.

Interviewer: What was she like? Can you describe her at all?

Mabel Webster: She had dark hair, I remember that. She was quite, she had sort of a [mannish 00:13:11] way about her.

Interviewer: Why do people remember her so? She had a real sense of humor or...

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. She liked to draw. She wanted to draw the back of my head some time. I thought that was not very much of a compliment.

Interviewer: She was the art instructor?

Mabel Webster: Yeah. I remember mechanical drawing I had with her.

Interviewer: We were talking the last time too about the fraternities and the sororities.

Mabel Webster: About what?

Interviewer: The sororities.

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. There was [inaudible 00:13:50] they were [inaudible 00:13:52] they made the most money. And then there was the Alpha Deltas and the [Agonians 00:13:57]. I think there were three. I took, I was in the Agonians.

Interviewer: You were in the Agonians?

Mabel Webster: Yeah, that was the [inaudible 00:14:04] girls. There was the boys. The [inaudible 00:14:08] and the Gammas and [inaudible 00:14:12].

Interviewer: I know sometimes they had dances and things like that.

Mabel Webster: We just danced in the gym during our noon hour. We never had proms in those days. They might have had extra basketball games but there were no dances. Not very much.

Interviewer: What did you do in the Agonians?

Mabel Webster: Hmm?

Interviewer: What were your activities.

Mabel Webster: Most of our activities were studying. I don't remember them much except that. Oh we had the color day. We had the color day once a year.

Interviewer: What was that like? I hear a lot about that.

Mabel Webster: I really don't remember much about that. I think we had a Maypole. We danced around a Maypole. People had rehearsed it. We had the day off, no classes, and everybody could do what they wanted to. I don't know whether they had any public speakers or not.

Sometimes we had guest speakers in the auditorium. I guess I told you about that before.

Interviewer: Like who?

Mabel Webster: When you were a senior you had to get up and make a talk. You had to write it yourself and then tell it from memory in the general assembly which would be around 10 o'clock. When you first got there at 9 o'clock and then around 10 we had this assembly where they had announcements and keep track of attendance. They would sing.

Sometimes they'd have us or one of the teachers would come up there. It was just a general assembly. Then the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag was then.

Interviewer: Did you give a speech?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: On what?

Mabel Webster: I did a talk on the religious renaissance in the sixteenth century.

Interviewer: Oh my.

Mabel Webster: I don't remember a word that was in the speech but I do remember the title.

Interviewer: Were you nervous?

Mabel Webster: Not very, no. I had something else on my mind. My father was taken to the hospital that day. I was thinking more about him. He had an operation on his stomach and he died that week so I was pretty worried about him.

When you've got something else on your mind you can't worry about one thing like that. I got through it without any prompt or anything.

Interviewer: That must have been a hard week for you then.

Mabel Webster: Yeah, it sure was. That was the 4th of December.

Interviewer: Who took over the farm after your father passed on?

Mabel Webster: We all did. My brothers did it mostly.

Interviewer: You were able to finish going to school?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. We all went to school. During the first World War there were none of my brothers drafted because they worked on a farm. We sat cabbage, I remember. We had a cabbage setter. You've probably seen them where you sit in the back, with a big barrel up on it and two horses drawing it.

It was a machine every time it would click you would stick a plant in the ground. They did every other one. Maybe now they're four or five men on it. We'd set cabbage and what else did we do. We raised beans.

I was forking out beans the day the whistle blew for the Armistice. That was quite a celebration.

Interviewer: Was there a parade when the soldiers came home?

Mabel Webster: Oh, that was Armistice day. No, we didn't have a parade when they came back, I don't think. They had a parade that day. Bells rang, whistles blew.

Interviewer: Did a lot of local boys go to the war?

Mabel Webster: A few of them. No one was killed from our [inaudible 00:18:01] I know. I remember the trains, going on the trains when they'd leave Brockport there'd be a whole bunch of them. People would go to see them off.

Interviewer: The troop trains?

Mabel Webster: Yeah.

Interviewer: Speaking of that kind of thing. Do you remember were there any Civil War Veterans around that you remember as a girl?

Mabel Webster: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Any of the old [crosstalk 00:18:26].

Mabel Webster: No, my parents were born about the time in 1863 so I would be pretty small.

Interviewer: I know there was a DAR post in Brockport, but I don't know how late that was around.

Mabel Webster: The Daughters of the, well that was the Revolution.

Interviewer: Getting back to the Normal School, what kind of memories do you have of your studies there? Do you feel they gave you good training for teaching?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. They only had two years, you couldn't do an awful lot in that length of time.

Interviewer: Do you think it was too short?

Mabel Webster: Yeah.

Interviewer: After you graduated you did teach for a short while didn't you?

Mabel Webster: I taught right there in Garland and it was right in my own home town. I was only eighteen. The discipline was my problem. I had to give it up. It was a lot of boys there that were foster children that came from Rochester. They were more than I could handle.

Interviewer: How old were they?

Mabel Webster: Oh, sixteen. Old enough but young enough that they had to go to school.

Interviewer: They were probably hard to discipline.

Mabel Webster: Oh, I couldn't do a thing with them. They got a man to teach there after I quit. Then I went to do office work. There was an old canning factory there in Garland.

I did office work there and then another brother was manager of a same outfit in Spencerport, there was a canning factory there so I rode with one of my brothers over there and did office work and made out pay envelopes.

Nothing was done by check, it was all cash. We had stuff brought in by freight on trucks. Cans from Philipsburg. Now it's all a shopping center. Everything changes, so nothing is the same.

Interviewer: How did you get into the line of being a seamstress?

Mabel Webster: Oh, I made drapes and there was a lady that taught me how. What was her name now... Marks. Her last name was Marks. She would go in the city and cut the slip covers out and bring them out and I would stitch them. I think I got, I suppose, I can't remember. I think I got \$15 for making a davenport and \$10 for a chair or something like that.

Interviewer: When did you start doing that?

Mabel Webster: Let's see, my daughter was about four years old, and she was born in '29. Must have been around '34 or '35 that I began working for her. She would come and get me with her car. So when she would go in the city I'd stay home at her house and do sewing. She had an electric machine.

That's about the first time I started using an electric sewing machine. She made drapes, we made drapes too. She taught me how to make drapes.

Interviewer: Where did you live then? Were you living in Brockport?

Mabel Webster: I lived on Lawrence Road. This was after I was married. That was on another farm, and that was a bigger one. That was over a hundred acres.

Interviewer: So your husband was a farmer?

Mabel Webster: His father and mother were both farmers so he worked on the farm with them. I helped too. We raised tomatoes. It's a job to pick tomatoes. It's a heck of a first day. You get so lame at first and then your muscles get used to it.

We had a wood lot there and the men worked in the woods in the winter. Of course, we had our own garden. I guess that's all I can remember.

Interviewer: What about the 1930s, the depression?

Mabel Webster: That was the time of the depression.

Interviewer: Was that a hard time around here?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. All the banks closed. I lost, had two banks. Money in Spencerport, another one I took it out. I went in, I knew they were going to close so I went in to draw my money out. I had some checks that I had sent mail for something away, so I left money enough to cover those checks and of course that didn't do any good.

They had to make the checks good afterward. They would pay a certain percent and every once in a while they'd send you a few dollars. I had some more money in Spencerport. It was a hard time. You'd go into the bank to draw your money up and the president would be there, face white as a sheet, and he'd just stare.

Interviewer: [inaudible 00:23:38]

Mabel Webster: I went [inaudible 00:23:38]. I did put out a place in the woodshed with a dirt bottom. We dug a big hole in the woodshed and buried it in a tin can, it was that simple.

Interviewer: It was probably safer then.

Mabel Webster: Well, we just were petrified so to think that you're going to lose everything.

Interviewer: You worked hard for it. How long did you stay on the farm on Lawrence Road?

Mabel Webster: Well, my mother-in-law died in '43 and we still stayed there. His father was still living. We were on the farm until 1948, we moved to Brockport just in that house down the street there. I've been here this long.

Interviewer: Did you have much contact with the school after you finished?

Mabel Webster: No, not after I finished. I've never been back to a reunion. There's one girl, Renna Cook, I still see her once in a while. [inaudible 00:24:38] she comes a few times but...

Interviewer: They graduated in your class?

Mabel Webster: Oh, yeah. It was, Renna Cook was. So many of them are dead I don't see them except in the cemetery.

Interviewer: Did they have much in the way of reunions or you just didn't want to go?

Mabel Webster: Oh, I don't know. I was just too busy or something. [inaudible 00:25:18]

Interviewer: What kind of things did you do when you were a student here to socialize?

Mabel Webster: I really didn't have much time to socialize.

Interviewer: Did you ever have time to go to the drug store and get pop or anything like that?

Mabel Webster: Didn't have pop, not that I know of.

Interviewer: Did they have soda fountains or something?

Mabel Webster: They had ice cream parlors. At the corner where the Strand is there was an ice cream parlor.

Interviewer: Did you ever go there with any of the girls from school?

Mabel Webster: I remember when I graduated in the eighth grade, the boys and girls went there [inaudible 00:26:05]. Billy Carter was there. We just stayed a little while and then it was back home.

Interviewer: The one thing you mentioned before was about a black girl who was at the Normal School.

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. She was the only black person in the school.

Interviewer: What was her name?

Mabel Webster: Her name was Jones. She lived here in Brockport, but she was the only one.

Interviewer: What kind of treatment did she get?

Mabel Webster: Well, girls didn't want anything much to do with her. I felt sorry for her and I used to go around together once in a while, take a walk around the campus or go downtown with her. I think during our noon hour we must have been allowed to be downtown.

Interviewer: Where did you go downtown?

Mabel Webster: We'd go to the post office or go get something to eat at the ice cream parlor.

Interviewer: Did you do that or did you bring your own lunch?

Mabel Webster: Did I what?

Interviewer: Did you bring your own lunch?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. There was no cafeterias in those days. I don't know what time that started but everybody brought their lunch in a brown bag or one of this tin folding ones that carried the books. It was a [inaudible 00:27:22] all the time. We lived through it. The only drinks we had were the drinking fountains in the school. We couldn't have nothing else. I imagine you could even get a cup of coffee around there.

Interviewer: What did the teachers do for lunch?

Mabel Webster: I don't know. We didn't see many of them during lunch. Either went home or, of course they all lived right in town here. Enough of them stay at their [inaudible 00:27:59] there.

Interviewer: Wasn't there a student lounge in the old Normal? A room for the students to sit in?

Mabel Webster: No, I don't remember that then.

Interviewer: Maybe that was later. There were rooms for the fraternities and sororities, weren't there?

Mabel Webster: Yeah, on the top floor of the last building. There were kitchens, there were stoves anyway because we'd go up and make hot cocoa once in a while on nights after school.

Interviewer: So you'd get together?

Mabel Webster: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you go up there to have meals or things like that?

Mabel Webster: I don't remember. It was so far. I lived out in the country and couldn't go to things in the evening much on account of transportation.

Interviewer: It was hard for you to take part in that kind of thing.

Mabel Webster: Yeah.

Interviewer: Sure.

Mabel Webster: There were a lot of country kids there but we didn't socialize very much.

Interviewer: Do you remember Dr. Cooper much?

Mabel Webster: Charlie Cooper, yeah.

Interviewer: Did he get you the job in Garland?

Mabel Webster: Oh, no. The trustee was a woman and she lived nearby us so I played to her and she gave me a job. Once a year we'd get the job of cleaning the

school house. They'd give us \$2 for cleaning the school house. That was fun. We had to wash all the black boards and mop the floor.

Interviewer: Where was the school?

Mabel Webster: Right across from the church. Kitty corner from our house. We lived on Ridge Road and the church was over here, and the school here, and our house was there so we could go across.

Interviewer: Oh I see. Is your house still there?

Mabel Webster: Oh sure. My mother was born there and she died there. I was born there. No hospitals in those days.

Interviewer: Your brother still lives there?

Mabel Webster: Not there, he lives across the street, right on the corner house. It used to be the parsonage for the minister but now we've hooked up with [Adams Mason [00:30:09] and the parsonage is over there. We have the same minister for the two churches.

Interviewer: I see. What else do you remember about at the Normal School, the other students? What were they like mostly? Was there a big division between the town students and the country students?

Mabel Webster: Oh, no. Not that much. It was, we were all friends.

Interviewer: You had friends who were from the town and from out in the country?

Mabel Webster: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Just out of curiosity you were talking about the black girl, Jones. Were there many black people around?

Mabel Webster: There was one old lady who was a seamstress. She would go into the houses and maybe stay all day and sew. She lived to be 96 years old.

Interviewer: Do you remember her name by any chance?

Mabel Webster: Gertie Page.

Interviewer: Oh, Page.

Mabel Webster: Page. P-A-G-E. She had a brother that she lived with. I think his name was Harry Page.

Interviewer: You know, I was in the Brockport museum yesterday or the day before yesterday-

Mabel Webster: I'd love to go there. I never did that.

Interviewer: Oh, you should try to go down sometime. They have a picture of a black man named Page who came to Brockport on the Underground Railroad just before the Civil War. That might be that family.

Mabel Webster: That was her brother.

Interviewer: That might have been her brother that had done that. Interesting. Did you ever meet the brother?

Mabel Webster: No I never seen him. He stayed pretty home.

Interviewer: Where did they live?

Mabel Webster: They lived on Garden Street.

Interviewer: Is that in Brockport here?

Mabel Webster: Yeah, it's off of Erie or State Street and Garden Street is the second or third street to the right.

Interviewer: All right. One thing I was a little curious about, being in this area with the canal, do you have many memories of the canal?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. They used to have mill trains to draw the things.

Interviewer: Do you remember that then?

Mabel Webster: Oh, yeah. I seen the mill trains go around. Didn't have much boats on the canals in those days.

Interviewer: No?

Mabel Webster: I don't remember when the lift bridges started, though. But yeah I remember the old trolley tracks. They went down, come from Holly or some place, right by the canal most of the way there they were.

Interviewer: Did you used to take the trolley?

Mabel Webster: You'd take it if you wanted to go into Rochester. Another girl and I went in one day. I don't know how our folks let us go.

Interviewer: It sounds like you had so much work to do then.

Mabel Webster: Oh, they kept us busy. We didn't have much time to fool around. No vacuum cleaners. You had to take the rugs out on the clothesline and beat them with a carpet beater. Have you seen a carpet beater?

Interviewer: I don't know.

Mabel Webster: It looks like a tennis racket almost. It's all steel. You'd take a whack until the dirt stopped flying out of it and then take it in.

Interviewer: Sounds like a dusty job.

Mabel Webster: Kind of dirty.

Interviewer: When you went to the Normal School do you think they gave you a lot of homework? Did you have a lot of homework to do?

Mabel Webster: They kept us busy pretty much. We had to take books home all the time. We had to go to study hall if we didn't have a class.

Interviewer: Was there a dress code at the Normal? You had to wear a certain kind of clothes?

Mabel Webster: Oh, no. You could wear what you wanted to. For gym, they had bloomers that come right below your knees [inaudible 00:34:31].

Interviewer: I've seen the pictures.

Mabel Webster: Yeah, we had lockers down in the basement and kept the gym clothes in there. And sneakers. We had sneakers.

Interviewer: Now who taught you the gym classes?

Mabel Webster: The same lady that taught them sewing and cooking for the girls. I don't remember her name. It was Ida something. Then there was Herbie, I can't remember that man's name. I can see him just as plain as can be but, I can't tell you who it was.

Interviewer: For teaching gym for the boys?

Mabel Webster: No, this lady taught the girls, the man taught the boys.

Interviewer: I should have brought one of the year books so you could show me his picture.

Mabel Webster: Yeah I'll have to think about it. I'll think about it in the middle of the night, probably. I remember Dr. Thompson. He had a daughter, Miriam. I don't suppose she's living now.

Interviewer: Was she a student when you were there?

Mabel Webster: Yeah, she was a student.

Interviewer: Was she your age?

Mabel Webster: No, she was older than I am. Maybe she wasn't a student. [inaudible 00:35:48] she was in the office or something.

Interviewer: He would have been in the house there on the property?

Mabel Webster: Did he? I don't know.

Interviewer: It was that yellow house there on Utica street right in front of the college. I thought the principal lived in that house?

Mabel Webster: Yeah. He lived there.

Interviewer: Did you ever go there?

Mabel Webster: Oh, yeah. I made the drapes for the place. He wasn't living there anymore but I made them all.

Interviewer: When you were a student there, did you have like a reception for the students or anything like that?

Mabel Webster: It seems as if there was something what time. I can't remember what though. I don't remember ever being in it except for when I went there to make the drapes.

Interviewer: What was it like?

Mabel Webster: It was just like all old houses. Not especially elaborate I don't think.

Interviewer: Do you feel that when you went to the Normal the teachers really got to know you? It was a pretty small school, really, wasn't it.

Mabel Webster: Oh, yeah. We didn't have more than twenty-five in a class.

Interviewer: How many people were in your graduating class?

Mabel Webster: I think it might have been fifty? Fifty would be a lot. Probably less than fifty. It was a small school not what it is now.

Interviewer: There was a lot of opportunity for teachers to talk with you and...

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: If you had it to do over would you go back to the Normal?

Mabel Webster: I couldn't go anywhere else. It was the only college available that didn't cost anything.

Interviewer: Was that a big reason for going there?

Mabel Webster: Oh yeah. Probably. No question about whether you would go or not. It didn't cost to go. My oldest brother went there. He taught school for quite a while.

Interviewer: Where did he teach?

Mabel Webster: I'm trying to remember. Was it Fairport, it was off in that direction. Brighton I guess it was. He taught for several years. His name was Frank McCagg. Then he ended up in a manager of a Red and White store downtown here. It was a grocery store, a chain store, so he worked there until as long as he lived.

Interviewer: Was it just you two that went to the Normal?

Mabel Webster: Yeah. Well, the next brother Wilson he wouldn't go only one year because he wouldn't give a speech at the year. He wouldn't give what they called a rhetorical. He said he was too shy to get up there and make a speech.

Interviewer: So he didn't finish?

Mabel Webster: He quit just after one year. George, I think he graduated. He was the youngest.

Interviewer: What did they go on to do?

Mabel Webster: He didn't go on to anything. He lived on the farm I guess. My father died in 1921 and I don't remember George going to college.

Interviewer: He stayed on the farm and worked the farm?

Mabel Webster: Yeah. See my mother was still living. My grandmother didn't die until 1932. She was 98 when she died.

Interviewer: Wow.

Mabel Webster: That's pretty old.

Interviewer: Yes it is.

Mabel Webster: The oldest one that's alive of the boys is 95.

Interviewer: And he's the one who taught? This is your brother who is over in Garland?

Mabel Webster: Yeah, the one that lives in Garland.

Interviewer: Can you think of anything else about the normal school that you'd like to mention?

Mabel Webster: I remember the principal's office was in that building. I don't think, I think we pretty well covered everything.

Interviewer: The classes that you took, that was a pretty laid out thing, wasn't it. You didn't have any choices about which class you would take.

Mabel Webster: No, we just took whatever we were supposed to. I can't remember much choice.

Interviewer: I know looking at the catalogs for that time it looks like it was pretty spelled out what you would take.

Mabel Webster: Yeah. How many teachers do they have nowadays?

Interviewer: Several hundred.

Mabel Webster: That's quite a difference.

Interviewer: We have 9,000 students now. It's a different environment.

Mabel Webster: Yeah, I guess so.

Interviewer: I think in some ways it's, well, it's just different. I think we can stop here for now.