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BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

MARY WELTER O'MEARA

at Mrs. O'Meara's apartment

INTERVIEWER: SHIRLEY TANZER

Date of Interview: October 28, 1982

SUMMARY OF TOPICS DISCUSSED

INTERVIEW WITH: MARY WELTER O'MEARA

BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

1. Family to Oregon from Chicago by train.
2. Building greenhouses in Oregon City and Beaverton
3. Raising lettuce and cucumbers
4. Visiting relatives; travel
5. School at St. Mary's; language barrier
6. Nurses' training at St. Vincent's
7. Nursing in Hawaii
8. Own first Buick in Beaverton
9. Meeting Frank O'Meara
10. Husband worked at Mt. Calvary Cemetery
11. Childhood in Beaverton, activities
12. Changes in Beaverton
13. Serres greenhouses, Oregon City
14. Beaverton early doctors
15. Welter Greenhouses, Beaverton

(Where unknown, phonetic spellings are used)

INTERVIEW WITH MARY WELTER O'MEARA

for

BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Place: At Mrs. O'Meara's apartment

Interviewer: Shirley Tanzer

SHIRLEY TANZER: Mrs. O'Meara, where did your family come from?

MARY WELTER O'MEARA: Luxembourg, Germany.

TANZER: And when did they come to this country?

MARY: Before they were married.

TANZER: Are you the oldest in the family?

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: So it would be about 1980.

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: Where did they go when they came to this country?

MARY: Well, they came to Chicago because they had relatives there. The three children were born in Chicago. From Chicago, we went to Hammond, Indiana.

TANZER: What were the reasons they came to Oregon?

MARY: Well, they didn't like it back there. My aunt and uncle decided to come to Oregon; my uncle had a brother here in Woodburn.

TANZER: What was the uncle's name?

MARY: Serres. So they landed in Oregon City. We all came together on a train.

TANZER: Do you remember the train ride?

MARY: Well, I do, yes. I was that old. I think I was about 6. And the others were just a year younger.

TANZER: So your sister was five and your brother was four.

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: So that year that you came to Oregon would have been about 1889, would you say?

MARY: Yes, around there. Yes.

TANZER: Just before the turn of the century. What was the train trip like?

MARY: Well, we'd never been on a train before, and of course, it was all new to us.

TANZER: There were your brother, your sister, your mother and father.

MARY: And my uncle and aunt and their two children. They landed in Oregon City and they built greenhouses in Oregon City, and my dad built these in Beaverton.

TANZER: Why did your father come to Beaverton rather than remain?

MARY: I don't really know; Beaverton was just a mudhole. That was where Lombard Street is now, and Alger. There are apartment houses there now. The greenhouses were torn down years ago.

TANZER: Did your father ever talk about his reasons for coming to Beaverton?

MARY: No, not particular. But he didn't want to go to Oregon City. He didn't like Oregon City, so they came to Beaverton.

TANZER: Did somebody help them get settled and build the greenhouses?

MARY: Yes, they had a carpenter. First he built two and then he built the others later. There were five greenhouses in all.

TANZER: Where did you live in Beaverton?

MARY: Where Broadway is now, and Alger Street, and there was no paved streets, nothing. Just a mudhole.

TANZER: Was it very different from what you had experienced in Indiana?

MARY: Oh, yes, it was different. Rain, rain, rain all the time. I didn't like that.

TANZER: How did your parents adapt to Beaverton?

MARY: Well, they did. They had to, I guess.

TANZER: What did they raise in the greenhouses?

MARY: They raised lettuce in the wintertime, and cucumbers in the summer. My dad had a covered wagon and he'd haul them to Portland from Beaverton.

TANZER: Did you ever go with him on those trips to Portland?

MARY: No. He went by himself. He went quite often -- about once a week.

TANZER: Did he ever talk about the markets?

MARY: Yes. Oh, yes. He talked about them. See, that was in 1910, and the greenhouses were already built.

TANZER: How many children were in your family at that time?

MARY: There were six of us in all; three girls and three boys. Two were born here. And there was another boy, Mike Welter; he's passed away, too. He was just three months old when we came from back east.

TANZER: So there were actually four children when you came here, and the other two boys were born here. And what were their names?

MARY: John. One John passed away, that was it.

TANZER: Now, tell me about your father. How much schooling had he had?

MARY: I don't think in Germany they had very much schooling. My mother couldn't read or write English until her later years when she learned it. But my father was pretty well educated because he'd been around, you see.

TANZER: What was his first name?

MARY: Michael.

TANZER: Michael Welter. Did he farm outside as well as the greenhouses?

MARY: No. He never liked farming. That's why we left Indiana.

TANZER: So this was the kind of work he did all the time, the greenhouses. And did it provide your family with a comfortable living?

MARY: Yes. Oh, yes, pretty good.

TANZER: Did you have your own home?

MARY: Yes. We built a new home. When we first come, we bought the property from an old Italian man; I don't remember his name. The house was straight boards up and down, but we didn't live in there very long; we then built a new house with some old fellow, a carpenter that my dad got acquainted with. But he didn't build the greenhouses; I don't know who built the greenhouses.

TANZER: So you built a new house on Broadway and Alger?

MARY: Well, where Broadway is now, it was way down on Alger, yes. That wasn't the name of the street then, but that's what the name is now. There was no name on the street.

TANZER: How did people know where you lived?

MARY: Well, there wasn't too many (laughter), so...

TANZER: But they did know the greenhouses. Now, did you know your grandparents at all? Did they come here?

MARY: No, they never came.

TANZER: Tell me about your mother. What was her family name?

MARY: Jennetten. She was also from Luxembourg. They met in Chicago and were married in Chicago.

TANZER: What type of childhood did your mother have? Did she talk of it?

MARY: No. Not particular.

TANZER: The aunt and uncle that you came west with, was that her sister? And did they continue to live in Oregon City?

MARY: Yes. Yes. They built greenhouses, too.

TANZER: Did you spend very much time with these relatives?

MARY: Well, yes, we did. As much as we could. It was quite a ways to go.

TANZER: How did you travel when you visited?

MARY: Well, we went on the Southern Pacific to Oregon City.

TANZER: What type of work did your mother do?

MARY: I don't think she did anything outside of housework, kept up the family. She was a good cook -- baked bread, and ...

TANZER: And she made your clothes?

MARY: No, she didn't sew. But she knit stockings. She knit our stockings, long black stockings.

TANZER: You were the oldest in the family? Tell me about your brothers and sisters.

MARY: Well, my oldest brother; my dad purchased a farm out toward Tigard way (Scholls) and my brother went on that after he was married.

TANZER: Now what was his name, the oldest brother?

MARY: Matt. So Dad put him on the farm out there. There was land to clear, and they cleared the land, and he got blowed up with a stump and killed. That was a big tragedy in our family.

TANZER: Oh, dear. He must have been very young.

MARY: So that was that.

TANZER: And your sister then married someone in Beaverton?

MARY: Yes, Frank Hoboke. They lived in eastern Oregon when they were first married but later on they came back to Beaverton. My brother John was a barber. He never married. He went to barber school and had a barber shop in Portland. He went back and forth every day. My sister Katherine lives in Salem now. She's the youngest one.

TANZER: So in the family, there's still all the girls --

MARY: Katherine, Ann and I.

TANZER: What did you do together as a family?

MARY: Well, we went to school. We couldn't talk English when we started school.

TANZER: What did you talk?

MARY: Luxembourg. We had an awful time. Finally we got to go to school at St. Mary's of the Valley. There was no church in Beaverton. We went to church at St. Mary's.

TANZER: How old were you when you started school down at St. Mary's.

MARY: Well, I guess my sister and I were around 8 and 9. We finished grade school at St. Mary's. There was no high school, so we just went through the 8th grade.

TANZER: Did you have some favorite teachers at St. Mary's?

MARY: Sister Vincent, Sister Agnes.

TANZER: Why were they favorites?

MARY: Well, I don't know. Sister Agnes, when they built the other house, was at the Institute. Sister Vincent never talked but we liked her.

TANZER: How did you get to school every day?

MARY: My sister and I and my brother (My brother went to the boys' school --orphanage) had a cart and a horse. My brother drove the cart and later on when my brother went to work, my sister and I rode two Shetland ponies to St. Mary's to school. Later on we walked up the Southern Pacific railroad track.

TANZER: And St. Mary's was where it is now?

MARY: No, this St. Mary's is across where Damerow Ford is now.

TANZER: Where did you go to school?

MARY: Where Damerow Ford is now. That is all there was, was St. Mary's.

TANZER: Was the priest's house where the store is now, the Dark Horse. The school was where Damerow Ford is. There is a house right next to it. The house is now a store, a shop. There's a Damerow Ford that's in there.

MARY: No, it's General Motors.

TANZER: Oh. Because Damerow Ford in Beaverton was where St. Cecilia's was.

MARY: Yes. That's right.

TANZER: So where General Motors is, is where St. Mary's was. I see. Before this one was built. That is really quite a distance.

MARY: Yes. After we got through the 8th grade, I decided to be a nurse, so I went in training at St. Vincent's. I graduated from nurses training in 1918.

TANZER: Where did you nurse?

MARY: I worked for a while at Milwaukie TB sanitarium. I did private nursing, then decided to go to Hawaii and stayed there three years. I came back in 1930.

TANZER: Was it at a hospital?

MARY: Oh, yes. Hawaii was quite a big place at that time. I worked at plantation hospitals and in the main hospital.

TANZER: That must have been quite an adventure for you at the time. How did your parents adjust to the fact that you were going some place like Hawaii?

MARY: Well, they said if you want to go, that's O.K. My dad had given up the greenhouses then and we lived in a big white house on 3rd or 4th and Lombard. We bought a house there and we had the first Buick in Beaverton. My brother drove it. It was a gray Buick and he put the top down.

TANZER: Is the big white house still standing?

MARY: Yes, on 3rd and Lombard.

TANZER: Well, we'll have to look for it. So your father made his money in the greenhouse business. Did he invest in real estate at all?

MARY: Not any more than a house and the farm out at Scholls. He sold the farm on Scholls after my brother was killed.

TANZER: You came back here in 1930; how did you meet your husband?

MARY: Oh, I knew him years before.

TANZER: Did he live in Beaverton?

MARY: Yes. They lived at Quatama, north of Aloha. There's a little store there, where the Oregon Electric stopped.

TANZER: Oh, I see. What was his name?

MARY: Frank O'Meara.

TANZER: Had you known him from school, or how had you met him?

MARY: Oh, I met him years ago. I knew his family before. We went to church in Beaverton together. We attended St. Cecelia's, where Damerow Ford is now. He was a little older, not much. His folks lived at Quatama and they had a farm. But I knew the family years ago.

TANZER: You said the O'Meara family were farmers. What did they raise?

MARY: Well, just grain. We married in 1932. And our daughter was born January 16, 1934.

TANZER: So she's not quite 50 yet. And she'll hit you for telling, for saying that she is (laughter). But you said that you continued to live in Quatama. What were some of the activities that you had?

MARY: Well, she went to school at St. Mary's. My husband worked at Mt. Calvery Cemetery at that time and he'd go to pick her up and drop her off at school.

TANZER: Did you have some particular interests or organizations that you belonged to?

MARY: Oh, yes. I belonged to the Church Guild and things like that.

TANZER: You still lived in Quatama, though. Did you ever move back to Beaverton?

MARY: Yes, later on. (can't remember just what year it was) we moved to Beaverton. We sold the place and moved to Beaverton. My sister lived on 6th and Main and we bought the house from her. She moved in an apartment. Her husband had passed away several years ago.

TANZER: So you lived in Quatama all during the 30's? What was life like during the Depression?

MARY: Well, we made it.

TANZER: How did you manage to make it?

MARY: Well, my husband worked and we got along all right. He helped with the graves at Mt. Calvery. He was only 72 when he died in 1962.

TANZER: And you were living in Beaverton at that time? Did you continue to live in the house in Beaverton then?

MARY: Yes. And my daughter got married. She still went to school at St. Mary's. In fact, I took her and two other girls every other day to school.

TANZER: After she was married, she moved to Salem. But you continued to live in Beaverton?

MARY: Yes. I continued to live in Beaverton, and then I finally sold the house and moved into an apartment. I lived with my daughter for a year. And then I lived on 2nd Street in Beaverton in those apartments on the corner there. I lived in those apartments for 17 years, and then I came up here; it'll be three years in May.

TANZER: Let's go back to Beaverton when you were a girl. I'd like to find out what you did in the city of Beaverton for excitement.

MARY: There wasn't much excitement (laughter). We went to dances, church

things and church dinners; St. Cecelia's had wonderful steak dinners.

TANZER: Were you active as a young child in St. Cecelia's, too? Were there church-related young peoples' groups?

MARY: Well, they're all gone now, I think, most of them. We had dances and things like that. And we'd give plays, too. They didn't go over really good, but it brought in money for the church and so on.

TANZER: Did you take part in the plays?

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: Did you go into Portland?

MARY: Yes. We had the red train, the red car. We went into Portland quite often, shopping at Meier and Frank's. Litlands was a big place, too.

TANZER: What did you shop for?

MARY: Clothes.

TANZER: What kind of stores were there in Beaverton then?

MARY: Well, there was the drug store and a confectionary. There was a lot of little shops around, but there wasn't much for a store in Beaverton.

TANZER: Did your mother go into the city very often?

MARY: Yes, we went quite often, about once a week. My sister Katherine went back and forth every day. She worked in town, at a store -- I don't know which.

TANZER: Who were some of your friends when you were growing up?

MARY: Well, the Davis girls. They're gone now. And some of the others, they're all passed away. And Dina went to school at St. Mary's with us. Agnes Kennedy, too.

TANZER: Do you remember their weddings?

MARY: Well, no, I don't remember their weddings really. See, I was in training for three years and I was away from Beaverton. Then afterwards I went to Hawaii.

TANZER: That must have been considered very adventuresome for a young woman to do that, and your parents did not object?

MARY: No, they didn't seem to.

TANZER: What was Hawaii like at that time?

MARY: Oh, it was wonderful I thought. Of course, I've never been back since. My daughter and I were going but never got there. She says we're still

going, but I don't know. I never went back to nursing after 1930. I had enough to do.

TANZER: And your "enough to do" was your family, and your church activities. Did you belong to any other Beaverton organizations aside from the church?

MARY: We belonged to World War I Auxiliary. I still belong. And I did belong to Veterans of Foreign Wars but it's too far to go so I haven't gone there.

TANZER: Do you belong to the Senior Center now?

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: What do you think about the way Beaverton has changed?

MARY: Well, I think it's remarkable, really. People that haven't been here don't know anything about it. There was what they call a corduroy road to Portland, bumpity-bump-a-bump. And Beaverton was just a mudhole. It was terrible.

TANZER: Yet the trains would come in and people would get off the trains and they stayed for a while.

MARY: Yes, yes, yes.

TANZER: Do you remember the Ku Klux Klan when it was here in Beaverton?

MARY: No. I heard something about it but don't remember too much.

TANZER: Did your father or your husband ever discuss it? Because they were very anti-Catholic. Did you feel any anti-Catholic feeling when you lived in Beaverton?

MARY: Well, some of them, I did. But we never paid too much attention to it.

TANZER: When did your parents die? Was it after you were married?

MARY: My mother died just after I came back from Hawaii. I took her to the hospital; she had a bleeding ulcer; we got there but there was nothing they could do. My father lived quite a few years longer; in fact, he married again, to some woman from Chicago. But he had never known her before. We didn't know her.

TANZER: Did your family get together for big occasions like Thanksgiving or Christmas?

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: With your aunt and uncle from Oregon City.

MARY: Yes.

TANZER: Tell me what happened to that family. Do you still have cousins?

MARY: Oh, yes. They had eight children and the boys are still running the Serres greenhouses. The youngest boy married and is still around the greenhouses. My father's greenhouses were torn down, but I don't know what year.

TANZER: There were a number of men in the greenhouse business like Dina's (?) father and also Mr. Classen(?). Was your father friendly with all of them, and do you remember them getting together?

MARY: Yes. They'd have Sunday picnics at the homes. They all had beer and a lot of food. Everybody brought food. They all got together during the summer, not during the wintertime.

TANZER: What did the families do during the winter?

MARY: Well, there wasn't much to do. There were quilting bees and things of this sort.

TANZER: Was your father interested in politics at all?

MARY: Oh, yes. In Beaverton as far as it went. He was a Democrat.

TANZER: (laughter) Well, there were a few of them. When the greenhouse men (who were mostly German) got together, did they talk about the old country?

MARY: Oh, yes. They were mostly Germans and Swiss Germans.

TANZER: What do you think were the most important events in your life?

MARY: Well, of course when I went into training, I thought that was wonderful. When I got married, I thought that was wonderful. When I had a daughter, that was wonderful. Now I have three adopted grandchildren. There's John, he's 20 and in the Navy, and there's the two girls who are 13 and 14.

TANZER: And they're all in Salem except John. Where is he stationed?

MARY: He was back in Memphis, Tennessee, this past year. Now he came back here, so he's closer to home. He's a nice boy.

TANZER: Do you like the changes in Beaverton that you see?

MARY: Yes, I think they're very nice, the new streets and sidewalks and everything.

TANZER: Do you still shop in Beaverton?

MARY: Yes, once in a while. I shop up here at Keil's most of the time.

TANZER: Do you remember Dr. Robinson, and Dr. C. E. Mason? Were they your doctors?

MARY: Yes, both of them were. In fact, Dr. Robinson, I shouldn't say this I guess...

TANZER: Oh, yes, you can say anything you want.

MARY: I had a ruptured appendix -- don't remember the year -- and he came to the house. He was an old man. He came to the house and I had appendicitis. It had ruptured and, well, he had my mother put a hot water bag on it. Then, when he decided it was appendicitis, he wanted to operate on me on the dining room table at home. Well, my dad said, "No." There were no cars, no ambulance, or nothing. My dad took me in in the covered wagon to St. Vincent's. I was operated on sometime during the night, but I pulled through.

TANZER: Dr. Robinson must have been very old then. Thank goodness your father wouldn't let him do that!

MARY: Oh, my mother wouldn't listen to it at all.

TANZER: Mrs. O'Meara, will you describe the Welter Greenhouses for me?

MARY: Well, first there were four built, and then he built one later, I don't remember the year. They raised cucumbers in the summer and lettuce in the winter. In the summertime my sister, my brother and I watered every day, the cucumbers. My mother had some very nice flowers and plants; she was always interested in that.

TANZER: Do you remember how much the lettuce and cucumbers sold for at that time?

MARY: No, I wasn't aware of that.

TANZER: Did you use the produce at home, the lettuce and cucumbers?

MARY: Yes, yes. My mother made pickles, and sauerkraut, too. My sister and I helped quite a bit in the kitchen. My mother made wonderful homemade bread, and then we started making cakes when we got older.