

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

TAPE 274

FORT ONTARIO REFUGEE PROJECT, REEL #5

DATE: November 19, 1983

Interviewee: Seward Salisbury

Interviewee: Muriel Perry

Interviewer: Lawrence Baron

[Long beep, long silence]

Lawrence Baron: This is November 19th, we're in the studios of WRVO, at Oswego, New York, and I'm interviewing Professor Seward Salisbury, who taught at Oswego State University for most of his life, and was a professor in the Sociology Department during the period when the refugees were at Fort Ontario.

You've written a book, or a pamphlet, on the sociological makeup of the religious backgrounds and mix in Oswego contributed towards, perhaps, a more favorable reception of the refugees than might otherwise have been expected?

Seward Salisbury: Well, Oswego in religious terms is very pluralistic; it has a number of Catholic churches and a number of Protestant churches and over the years the Catholics and Protestants have found to get along with each other quite well. So basically there's a great deal of ... I would say religious tolerance and religious understanding among Oswego religious people and churches. I remember a number of years ago one of the Protestant churches got a new Protestant minister who came down from Canada, and this minister was quite combative. Apparently he had lived in an area where the Catholic Church was very strong, and he wanted to be confrontational with Catholics in Oswego. And one of the leading parishioners said "We get along with Catholics---you don't do that in Oswego." Oswego's basically tolerant.

LB: And how did the...what about the Jewish community in Oswego?

SS: Well, a very interesting Jewish community, a small number of families and they supported they call an orthodox congregation, for years. I remember we had a Rabbi Nass, a young rabbi that was in the early '50's. Used to come up and talk to our classes and one Saturday he came up for some kind of a meeting, and he walked all the way up, about two miles from his residence. I said to him, "This is really quite a task, isn't it?"

And I always remember his answer. He said, "If a religion doesn't require you to do something, it isn't too good."

Although we have a small Jewish community in some of the leading professional people, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, are Jewish, on some of the high holy days, these people would not only attend the local synagogue, but they would go down to Syracuse to some of the big synagogues where the famous cantors would...well, Ralph Shapiro, Mayor of the city for a number of years...and there's a park---Ralph Shapiro Park--in the eastern part of town, an extension of West Third Street, it's called the Ralph Shapiro Park and it's basically for children. The Jews are very well accepted.

LB: What role do you think clergy played in paving the way for acceptance of the refugees when they came here in 1944-45, and what role did they play in helping the refugees?

SS: All the clergy were sympathetic. I'm not sure...course who were some of the leaders? Some of the teachers were leaders. I'm thinking of Marion Mahar, and Frances Brown, and Ralph Faust, and the Catholic priests. I can't think of a specific clergyman that was any more outstanding than any of the others but they were all very supportive and very sympathetic. In fact, practically all the churches had their small group of refugees who came to their... and some of the children went to parochial schools too.

LB: You mentioned about the educational community providing programs for the refugees. Could you elaborate on that, on what the university did, and also what the high schools and grammar schools did, but primarily the university?

SS: I was teaching at the university at that time, and after the residents got here and established --it took them a few weeks to do that -- it was possible for those of college age and at the college level to come to our college. I think there were eleven students altogether that were enrolled. I think there were a few more boys than girls. I had them in some of my classes and they represented a high type of European background, they were very competent, see, they could handle things very well.

We tried to bring them into the college community socially. At that particular time I was the...my wife and I were the advisors to the senior class. In 1944 most of our boys were in the service and so the student body was mostly girls. I think we had 35 students and in the spring we had a Senior Party and Dance down at our house. It happens that we had one of these old big houses and we could open some of these sliding doors so we had a great deal of room. These students came down, and everyone interacted, danced. Some of the boys---my wife remembers this-- represented European customs---they're very gracious to the hostess so when they left they kissed her hand. It was something that was little bit new to her. You can't be impressed with formal courtesy.

Then we had a series of lectures given by various members of the faculty that would be helpful in understanding America. So the college made a very definite attempt to entertain, and educate, integrate the people in to the community.

LB: As I recall, your wife mentioned that she taught foreign language, was involved in foreign language and the refugees were French?

SS: That's right. Had a French group and the refugees, course they could speak a number of languages. And that gave an opportunity again to bring a group into a home. So I'd say the social aspects of it were probably more important than the educational aspects. It was educational to us; we learned something from it.

LB: Did the refugees also provide other forms of mutual education, concerts?

SS: They had some concerts at the fort. There were some very talented people, singers, and there were some artists that were very talented too. I'm not too art oriented but my art friends said there was some real talent there. Of course, a number of these students went to the high schools and the high school teachers, particularly the principal, Ralph Faust, did everything he could and that was a great deal, to make their stay at the high school worthwhile. Then the various elementary schools...in fact, we had a practice school at the college at that time and some of the elementary school children from the fort were in the various classes. They impressed the Oswego children very much with their ability to speak a number of languages.

LB: What were the relationships between...not only at the college between the college students and the refugees but, from what you know, between the refugee students in the high school and the lower grades?

SS: I think they were brought in, socially in a good many cases...I know some of the American students at the high school and also in the elementary, I won't say they were jealous of but they really admired, or respected the ability of these Europeans to be so versatile in the various languages. And I guess it was an occasion whereby it would promote foreign languages in our school system here, which today is considered very important. And you were telling me that some of the students maybe got a little jealous about their language and tried to create their own or something?

SS: Well, Bill McGarvey, I remember the story, who taught Shop at the college and the various grades from the first grade, I guess, right straight up through the seventh or eighth. These little European children would be talking to themselves, be two or three in a class, Italian or German or something like that, and that kind of bothered the American kid. And he heard some of these American kids get off to the side and started doing

kind of a pig Latin type of thing. In other words they wanted to show that they could converse in another language too, but I guess that's normal for children that age.

LB: Were there any negative responses in the community towards having the refugees come in, any sorts of...I know there was a rumor column established and a rumor committee established to make sure that negative criticism was stopped. But what sort of things emerged from local townspeople?

SS: Well, some people thought, of course, that they were over there, and subsidized, and maintained, the old thing—our taxes support them and why can't they go out and work, course they couldn't go out and work because that was beyond the rules of their stay here at that particular time. Some of the families in the community developed rather strong personal relationships with individuals and families in the fort. There was quite a bit of inviting them out, you know, to eat. That was a learning situation both ways.

The only negative thing at the college---we were down to about eight or ten American boys who were 4F, all the other American boys were in some branch of the service. Some of these young fellows were 16, 17, 18, 19, or 20, and seemed to be in good health, just occasionally you'd get the impression: well why aren't these boys out fighting see, why are our boys supporting them? Course there was some basic reasons why they weren't. That was rather low-level negative and not too important, I would say.

LB: You mentioned earlier when I was talking to you that the college wanted to play a role in the war effort and that in a certain sense what happened with providing for the students wasn't new, it wasn't a new role for the college. Could you talk a little bit about that?

SS: Dr. Swetman, the President at that time, was brought in about 1934, '35, when they had a change of presidents, to upgrade the college. At that time Oswego was a three-year normal school and one thing to upgrade the college, many of the faculty had just Master's degrees, I guess there were only one or two Doctor's degrees on the faculty. He pushed the existing faculty to go out and upgrade themselves, and they brought in younger people---I was fortunate to be one of them who had degrees---to upgrade the college.

When the war came along the boys who began to go in the service and various faculty were going into specialized areas and he wanted to hold the college together. So he went to Washington and got a pre-pre-flight military group here. So in 1943 and '44 we had three or four hundred of these young pre-flight men on campus, some living in rooms and some in special rooms, and we gave them various courses---mathematics. I was brought in to teach geography, map-reading, things like that.

Well, at the end of '44 the program was phasing out because, definitely the war couldn't last too much longer and the Air Corps had all the men that they could take care of. So as the cadets were being phased out, the college looked upon the opportunity to make a contribution to the effort...the idealism of the war, to do

everything they possibly could with the refugees at the fort. Most of our faculty were involved in some way or another with the students. So we were glad to do it, glad to do it.

LB: In looking at the relationships between the refugees and town, there are a couple of other factors I wondered about, since you're a sociologist of the time. What effect do you think it had that Oswego was settled by so many immigrant groups that it really was an immigrant town?

SS: I tried to get the Cornell sociologists some years ago to use Oswego---they were making a big study on intergroup relations---well, they ended up taking Elmira, which was quite a bit closer. Oswego has all the big immigrant groups, with the exception of the Scandinavians. You know, the English came in, then the French came down from Canada, not too many years they had their own Catholic Church. Then the Germans came in, forties and fifties, and we had a Catholic St. Peter's German Church and a Protestant language Church, St. Paul's. Then the Italians came in, St. Joseph's Church, and the Polish came in. Then of course we had a Jewish synagogue. It's a wonderful cross-section of the American immigrant groups.

The first generation would pretty well stick together; the second generation the kids go out and become American; then the third generation the sociologists say their generation is trying to remember what their fathers' tried to forget. They try to come back and continue their language, whereas the first generation didn't want to take Italian because they wanted to be American, be different. So Oswego is a very good illustration of the pluralistic type of society.

LB: There was also a group of Black soldiers as I recall, at the fort, which was an interesting experiment, as well. Do you remember...it preceded the refugees but was one of the reasons why Oswego was chosen to locate at the fort.

SS: There was a Colonel Hooper, I think it was a National Guard unit, came from around Long Island, New York City, and Colonel Hooper was a Black. They were there. Then, of course, the soldiers are always looking for dates, you know, and for whites to date Blacks, there was always some white girls willing to date Blacks. Clearly got together and I would say it was a reasonably successful, you know, fort/community relations. Not too much different than ordinary soldiers being at the fort---whites---there was some problem whites dating local girls. I would say the community did a pretty good job.

LB: Any other things that you can recall, stories of specific refugees, or any other aspects in thinking of that period? Things that were staged at the university for the refugees, or whatever?

SS: Well, we had this series of lectures, which was helpful. Of course the refugees were finally able...they had a signed a statement that they would go back and they weren't here as citizens. The law was interpreted in such a way that they could go to Canada and then come back with a proper visa. A lot of them stayed in this country and some of them turned out to be quite successful. Some of them got in California in the movie industry, in various specialized categories. I think only one refugee family stayed in town and I think he was a shoemaker that sort, and I think maybe a photographer stayed in town too. As soon as they stayed they were part of the community. They wouldn't have stayed here unless they'd been reasonably happy. I would say the refugees in general averaged at least upper-middle class, they were an intellectual group, see. Course we learned a lot about European attitudes towards intellectuals and towards each other, really a learning situation as far as we people were concerned.

LB: Do you think some local people resented the high level of culture of the refugees who were brought here?

SS: I don't know...let's say lower-middle class probably resented upper-middle class. I used to teach...I don't think sociologists stressed classes as much as they used to. I remember one writer in sociology said when I say I'm just as good as you are, psychologically I am admitting that some people think, and maybe I myself think, that this person is better... has a higher social, intellectual background. It was a learning situation and I think the college and the town were fortunate that this facility over here...the Army gave it up, they decided that this small fort was no longer efficient as a training unit in the development of an Army or temporary Army. It's a good thing that they found a useful thing for it to do. Of course now it's a historic site and plays a very important part as that too.

LB: What other groups...you mentioned... we've talked about the clergy, we talked about the educational community. What other groups do you think were instrumental in welcoming and bring the refugees to Oswego?

SS: I suppose politically...after all, I guess if we read the biography of Roosevelt he wanted to do something. After all, we're fighting against the racism of Hitler. And here was Fort Oswego with all these housing facilities, you know, you could feed people and so on and so forth. Politically someone looked around and decided, well this would be a good demonstration, you know, that we are a haven. Of course, the argument against it is a thousand out of the thousands who would like to get out of Europe is a small part. It was a demonstration that the United States...so I'd said politically and certainly Roosevelt and the administration were very sympathetic too. Mrs. Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, she actually came here, and I remember seeing her up at the college, seeing her at the fort. She was really a very fine person. We used to say that FDR himself was pretty well limited, he was handicapped and his work, he couldn't get around the country. But she was the person who

could go around and see various groups and make a first-hand interpretation to him. She had a very definite influence on various policies that he sponsored and promoted.

LB: I also meant in town. What other groups besides the clergy and the university do you think were very instrumental in supporting or helping the refugees here?

SS: Well, our various Rotary and Kiwanis they're always looking for constructive things to do. And the leaders of Rotary and Kiwanis favored it certainly. And they would have some of these talented refugees come down to talk. I can't think of any group that officially was against it. Most of our positive community groups strongly supported it. It's another way in which Oswego could be a part of history. We like to think the canal, the lake, the longest occupied fort in North America up until 1942, the French and Indian War, Montcalm, we like to think we're still an important part of American history.

LB: Any other comments which...any memories you want to draw on of that time of refugees, specific experiences you might have had, specific refugees you might have met who impressed you?

SS: It was interesting to have the students in class. They were very smart; in many cases they knew all about the subject matter. You see, I was teaching them American history. They knew European history. We could give them American history. They were smart and intelligent. They were very constructive. They never promoted themselves. They tried to fit in and if they knew more than anyone else they wouldn't say "Teacher, teacher I know it." They were very constructive in adapting themselves to the American situation.

I think...there was one of the women at the fort, my wife got acquainted with, and something about...she wanted my wife... see these people couldn't get to Syracuse, at least for a while. And she wanted my wife to get her some special hair dye or something in Syracuse. I never paid too much attention to it. They had interests, you know. There were people who were going to Syracuse to do things, help out individuals with whom they were acquainted.

LB: Did they ever just...one final question. Do you remember the refugees ever telling of their own experiences before they came here, what had happened in Europe to them? Do you remember of those stories in particular?

SS: Well, yes. Of course, a lot of the refugees were in Germany first, then they got to France, or maybe to Austria, then finally as Nazism took over they got down to Italy. Fortunately there were some Italians who protected them, even though Mussolini was [?]. A number of them had lost relatives, they disappeared, if they didn't actually know then they knew later that they had lost their lives in these gas, you know, gassed and that type of thing. There were some very terrible things. You know, you like to forget those things, it's a tendency.

There's a movie coming up: *The Day After*. We like to forget those things, but I guess it's a good idea that we should know that such things did happen and can happen; you can't close your mind to them. These people were very fortunate to get here, so many of their relatives didn't make it...very, very difficult.

LB: I thank you for coming. I'm sorry we took so long in getting started. A number of things I wanted to get, I got. It's a thirty-minute tape. Thank you again. It's a pleasure. Say hello to your wife.

SS: She's sorry she couldn't come out. When we had the students at our home, week to week, and also especially that particular party; she really enjoyed it, and as I say, we got a great deal out of it. It was a learning experience for us. It was a small contribution but we're glad we were in a position to make it.

LB: Thank you. Hope you enjoy your golf outing today.

SS: It's got to get up to 50.

[Still Side 1]

Lawrence Baron: I'm interviewing Muriel Perry who taught at the fort, taught English to the refugees, adults, between October 1944 and 1946, January, I guess, 1946. How did teachers like yourself get involved in teaching at the fort?

Muriel Perry: Well, we taught in the public schools in Oswego and we were called in by the Superintendent to see if we'd like to take a job and I gave up my bowling to do it and I never got back into it but I don't regret it, for it was an experience, well worthwhile. We walked into the classroom the first night and I had twenty-seven Yugoslavs and eighteen Viennese people and I spoke not one word of their languages. And it was very difficult at first.

But there was about two in each group who could speak a little English. Hugo Wantoch was an older gentleman about seventy or early eighties and he was a banker in Vienna and he was a great help cause he could translate things and get them going. We did it mostly by pointing. And all through the camp they got the idea: "I walk to the window, I come from the door, the window is behind me, the door is before." And the biggest trouble Hugo tell...

[Side 2]

MP: ... “ph” was their problem and then we found lots of times that singing helped. One of the things, they were fenced in, *Don't Fence Me In* was a popular song, and when they first came they resented it very, very much, but then it got to be a big joke when they could go outside the fences at Fort Ontario.

They wanted to get into people's homes, they wanted to see what they were like inside. They didn't want to just go in your living room, they wanted to see everything. We had a new garden, we had bought our land recently and we rented our home because we hadn't built one. And my neighbor that we rented from, Mrs. Helen Orton, and my next-door friend, Mrs. Helen German, and my mother---my father had planted strawberries, and we had oodles...great big strawberries. The [?] decided to entertain each class for supper and at the end they served biscuits, real home-made biscuits, lots of strawberries. And I think one of the nicest parts about that was when we offered them... they were thrilled with the first helping but the second helping they were just amazed that they could have more. And they were delighted. The main desire was to see the insides of the house, and all three ladies let them go upstairs, even to the attic in Mrs. Orton's and Helen's---we didn't have an attic---and then they even let them go downstairs into the cellar where they had a grand time.

LB: Why do you think that was, about the houses?

MP: I suppose they hadn't been in their own homes for a long time and secondly, I think they thought the European homes were probably different from ours.

LB: Could you tell me...you were mentioning you taught them how to speak English by singing songs, and I remember when I interviewed you before a story about when you first taught them via *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

MP: Yes, the *Star-Spangled Banner*. They knew some of our popular songs and *The Star-Spangled Banner* they got so they could sing it fairly well, and every song it taught them they enjoyed because the words came better, the pronunciation. One night, it was near Christmas, I asked them to stand and sing *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and they did, and they were absolutely thrilled that they could do it. And then, I turned to them and I said, “Sing your own national anthem.” Well, they were just amazed; the tears ran down their cheeks and they said, “Could we, could we, is it possible?” Each one was kind of afraid to do it and I said “You stand right there and do it.” And so they did and when they finished they were all crying, and it was one of those moments where happiness was mingled with the tears and I just stood, I didn't do anything else, and they were so proud of me because I stood up for their national anthem and I didn't know one word of it. And it was one of those things that I'll never forget. I did it in the first class where there were twenty-seven and later on we did it and the same thing happened in the Viennese class, afterwards.

LB: You had an opportunity to get to know some of the adults in a way, I think, that many of the people in Oswego didn't get to know them. What sort of personal stories do you remember that they told you about what happened to them before they came to the fort?

MP: Well, some of the little incidents that happened were darling. In the Viennese class we had Jakob Bronner who was a baker, they were from Vienna, and Hugh Wantoch was a banker, and Gizela I suppose she had been a secretary or something, and Hugo...or Jakob was always bringing us fancy little pastries, he was a Vienna baker; they were out of this world and night after night when he got a chance to make some he'd bring them to class and especially to me, I brought some home sometimes.

Then for Thanksgiving they decided that they wanted a Thanksgiving dinner, like Americans. I guess I bought the turkey but they chipped in a little bit along in November each week, until they got enough money...that's the way my mother collected so I had them do the same...then Gizela made the dinner, with the ladies to help her and we had it right over to the fort. The food was out of this world. Maybe it was American style turkey and everything with it. She took the feet and made beautiful soup and we had that first and I was a little leery of it but it was the most delicious soup I ever ate. And the whole dinner was very, very nice.

Fritz Mandler and Margarete was his wife and Alice was his daughter and she was in high school with Mr. Faust and [Tiny Daim?], I think, and she had a nice time over there. And Fritz was delightful, he could speak a little English but Margarete couldn't. And she was very, very nervous, unmercifully nervous, and we all tried to sooth her down a little bit. Now Fritz explained and I couldn't seem to do much more than listen. And she was getting help, over to the fort, but she didn't even get better once they got down on Long Island later. Fritz said they owned their own business. One half of the store was musical instruments of all kinds, organs and pianos; evidently they had quite a bit of money then. The other half was jewelry and he said the first time they came they took every musical instrument they had.

LB: This is the Nazis?

MP: The Nazis. The next time, it was almost six months difference if I remember correctly, they took every bit of jewelry, and they knew the next time they came they would take them. And I suppose they had lost part of their family and this is what upset Margarete so much and I doubt if she might have got better in later years, they were about middle aged, Alice was a teenager of course. I heard from them for awhile after they went down on Long Island, not for too long, and she wasn't good the last I heard.

LB: I remember you told me about a man who had been in Buchenwald, an older man who first came to your classes, or maybe that was Fran Brown?

MP: I think that must have been Fran. We sang Christmas carols; Fran likes to tell the story on me. I am not what you call musical and she came in one day, right on a tear—our rooms were next to each other and we had picnic tables, and there was holes at the top and holes at the bottoms. She came in, “Goodness sakes, what’re you teaching?” And I was teaching one of the Christmas carols, I think, *Angels We Have Heard on High* or something like that, and I had had it to the tune of *Mother Dear O Pray for Me*. Then she explained to them and they all had a big chuckle out of it.

When they were about ready to leave Mr. Eisen had been with me all the way through, and they were so grateful for every little thing you tried to help each individual, and he brought me a great big diamond ring and it was absolutely gorgeous. He made sure my father and mother were there and it wasn’t an engagement ring or anything like that and he made clear about that, although he had a hard time telling me. I didn’t feel I should take it and it was awful hard job to tell him “no thank you” and I was delighted to do what I had done. We found out later that he had wealthy friends here who could afford to do those things for him. But I wasn’t sorry; I’m not fond of diamonds.

Hugo Wantoch was a dear friend, right from the beginning. He was really, I don’t know, in his late seventies or going on eighty...helped me no end, he spoke English fairly well, really quite well. “You wished to know why I attend the English classes. Well there are several reasons. One of them is that I found a teacher, a magician who understands splendidly how to make us enjoy our English lessons, so that I, for instance, who detests nothing more than to sit quietly on the floor when to study when I was a little schoolboy, couldn’t find at present a dearer hobby than to attend her class. The chief motive, however, for my studying English is the consideration that, unless I take a too optimistic view, we could be free at the most...” and this was one of their dearest wishes, “about three or four years.” They did get out sooner than that, I think. “We, then, may be permitted to immigrate into the U.S.A. Where I suppose it might perhaps be useful to speak English fluently. Another reason is that I find it is quite a nice change after having worked the whole day long in our welfare office, like I do, not to have to listen for a while to persons who wish to have their shoes repaired, they need eyeglasses, or complain about their [grants?] or wish absolutely to know the exact day we shall regain our complete freedom and liberty. In the English school, on the other hand, you are telling us all about nouns and adjectives, you are exasperatedly and successfully fighting against our public enemy number one: “The”. You are teaching us lovely songs like *I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas*, or my theme song, *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*, and the nice song of *My Darling Clementine*, whose shoes were number nine. Only our Fort Ontario national anthem, *Don’t Fence Me In*, sometimes spontaneously reminds us a little of our shelter life and the daily worries which you succeed in letting us forget for a short hour. Then after the lesson I then return to my little room. It’s mostly time to go to bed. I like to recall for a while that our recreation which the English school provided, and half asleep I’m dreaming of a nice sweetheart in a one-horse open sleigh and a little later in my dreams she appears to me dressed in a gingham, too, with her number nine shoes. Goodnight, Miss Perry, don’t be too mad at the bad boy of your class, I am, however, one of your most thankful pupils. Hugo Wantoch.”

He had a daughter left in Vienna and I've often wondered what happened to her.

[A brief blank—missed the question? Nothing on the tape to indicate why this segue.]

MP: It was Saturday, in Samuelson's Dress Shop on West First and Bridge. And I only knew my own two classes, because you were only there long enough to teach and you taught days at Kingsford Park Junior High. A lot of the strangers came in, and they were always very polite and very nice to us, and we sold dresses and things of that sort and I enjoyed the ones that I didn't know as much as I did the others.

But *Don't Fence Me In* was the popular song of the day and when they were first here it annoyed them and they learned it but they were furious with it because it meant that they couldn't even go into the city for quite a while. But as soon as the gates were lifted and they could go downtown and around, they were much happier.

LB: You mentioned that you also taught at the Junior High School. Were there any refugee students there?

MP: We didn't have any at my classes in Kingsford Park, and I taught the seventh grade where they probably would have come in. Some of them went to campus and they would go to Leighton and Castle and the other grade schools if they were smaller. Most of them were put right in high school because they were very smart.

LB: Do you remember any stories about how they did in high school? Or did any of their parents tell you anything about how they did?

MP: Alice got along very well but you see, Fritz spoke quite a bit of English, Margarete didn't, Alice could too, you see.

LB: Do you remember... I read a story about [Skastic Sabastian?] one of the young students?

MP: One of the sad things was that Oscar Fuchs and Jetty Fuchs they were from Yugoslavia and they were much older than... they weren't like Hugo Wantoch who could speak the English, they couldn't. And it seemed an almost impossible job and before they even left Fort Ontario they returned to their homeland, Yugoslavia. And I often wonder what's happened to them. I think that's about it.

LB: Do you remember in town, what some of the people who didn't have as much contact with the refugees, thought about the refugees, some of the local townspeople?

MP: Well, in my neighborhood, I was so crazy about them and had such a good time with them, they seemed to like them very, very much. Some people complained about them around town, but you know, that's true no matter what, some like and some don't.

They had to learn quite a lot at the Fort, I remember. For instance, coming into the classroom they pushed in, then they didn't want to move up or down or over to the other side, I had to teach them that you get just as much no matter where you are. And there were a lot of little things like that. They were inclined to have the one spot that they wanted.

Gizela Tusak who created the Thanksgiving dinner, went to Texas and Abraham Salzstein right from the time he came...they went to South America, they had friends there and they knew that they were going there.

LB: And you remember that... when was this letter from Hugo written when he said it might be three or four years before I get...?

MP: That was April, '45.

LB: So, very soon before they were going to get out.

MP: It was the New Year. Making noise here, sorry. [She's rattling papers.]

LB: You mentioned complaints. What other sorts of complaints?

MP: I didn't hear one, just once in a while one... Some would complain no matter what was going on, in my book. Now they moved, the Grunberg's, he was a baker, he had no trouble getting a job. And Hugo got a job, they went to Buffalo. "My dear Miss, Mrs. and Mr. Perry, Thank you for your nice letter. I will answer on Sunday and send you details about my life here in Buffalo. I am working for the moment just to earn what I need for my life. But I hope to find something else. Today I have to go for my first papers. I am working together with Rudy Selan from our shelter. The Selans and myself are the only ones here in Buffalo. Well, I have to go. 8:25 and 8:30 I have to be at my workplace. More in my next letter. Best regards, Hugo."

They weren't the only ones in Buffalo, the Grunberg's were there and quite a few others, but you see they weren't aware that different ones were there.

LB: Do you know if they are still in Buffalo?

MP: I don't know.

LB: How old would Hugo Wantoch ... he was older?

MP: Hugo was about the oldest one I had. You can tell by this picture.

LB: How old would he have been?

MP: I say he was in the 70's quite a bit. And Fritz Mandler and those people might between 45 and 55 or thereabouts. The Fuchses were very old and Oscar [Wessler?] was middle-age. A great many of them were middle-aged. Gizela Tusak and Abraham Salzstein were young.

LB: Did any of them tell...you mentioned the one story the music shop in Vienna...any other stories you remember from them?

MP: No, we were busy teaching all the time. You ran in from school, had your supper and went right away, and taught from six... well usually I stayed till nine. We didn't have much time to talk to them, only when they were at the home, at my house, went through all the homes---they wanted to see everything, they didn't want to miss a thing in the houses. Asked about everything, questions, they didn't speak to my mother and Helen, and Mrs. Orton when they came in, but in a few moments when they began to see things, the English flew, as much as they could use. And I don't think they got perfection, most of them, but they at least got so they understood enough and could go out and get by.

LB: Any other stories that you remember? I think we've got most of them about the dinner and the experiences, but any other stories?

MP: I don't think so.

LB: OK. Well I think you for coming.

MP: You're welcome.

LB: That letter is wonderful and I'm sure we'll use part of that. And *The Star-Spangled Banner*...

MP: Would you like a copy of it?

LB: We've got it on tape now, so it's fine for us. But basically it's funny. I took good notes on you.

MP: One thing I might say is that the Yugoslavs were middle class and the Austrians were mostly all businessmen or somebody high up in business, and it was a big difference, because quite a few of them could speak.

LB: Well, thank you very much.

MP: You're welcome.

LB: You did a good job, and you will be on there. We've got a lot more to do today.

MP: I was not around the town much, 'cause you see you were up at Kingsford all day and we got out for lunch then we didn't anymore. I'm glad to help.

LB: Just the things I wanted to hear because you have a perspective that a lot of people... Fran is the only other person I know...

MP: This isn't on now I hope?

LB: I don't think so. We're off aren't we?

Transcribed by jCook, fall, 2005