Orleans County Historical Association

Table of Contents : WILSON FOX Interview

SUBJECTS

NAMES

Orleans County Historical Association

INTERVIEW

Mr. Wilson Fox
East Bates Road
Medina, New York

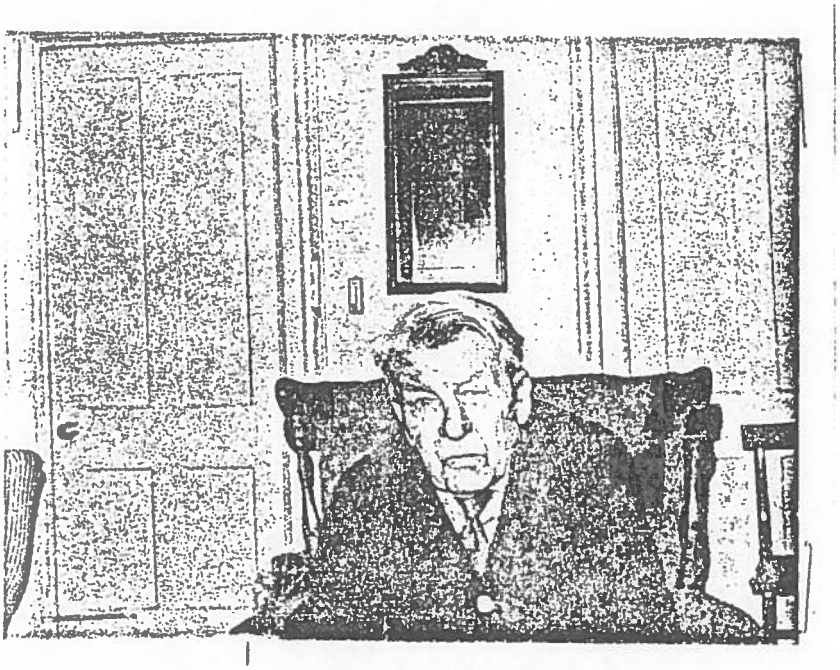
Mr. Wilson Fox was born November 30, 1893.

Interviewed by Mr. Arden McAllister.

(Mrs. Fox is also in the room and comments several times).

F Fox

Mc McAllister



Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Wilson Fox
Signed

11/15/79
Date

Understood and agreed to: Arden R. McAllister
INTERVIEWER

11/15/79
Date

F My birth date was November 30, 1893. I was born right here, in this house on Bates Road about a mile and a half out of Medina, on the west side of the road.

Mc What was your father's name, and can you tell us a little bit about your father?

F His name was William. In the first place my father came from Germany when he was three years old. The family settled up around Niagara Falls, in a place by the name of LaSalle. Then they kind of split up. Some of the girls went west, and some stayed; but he finally landed here, see, and worked for my grandfather....

Mc What was your father's name, originally?

F William Fox, but in German it was Fuch. They changed it when they came over here. I don't know why.

Mc Your father came here to work for, what was the name?

F Edward Wilson, which would be my grandfather.

Mc Okay. Tell us a little bit about your mother.

F Well, my mother, I didn't know too much about because she died when I was only three years old. All I could ever find out was that she was a pretty nice woman. You know what I mean? And I guess she was. Her name was Anna Wilson. ...

Mc Your mother died when you were three; and your father remarried and had a second family?... Did you have some half-sisters?

F I have three of them: Florence Britt (after her marriage), Ruth Foot, and Verna Kenyon (now Verna Reed as she married again. Her first husband died, see.).

Mc Was it your grandfather that had a rather interesting association with the Civil War?

F My grandfather, my Dad's father

Mc What was his name?

F I never heard his first name. Never did. My Dad might have told me but I forget, you know. No, I can't remember.

Mc Do you want to tell us a little bit about him?

F Well, at the time of the (Civil) War, it seemed as though that anybody here that could afford it, they could hire somebody to take their son's place in the War, see. And that was what was offered my grandfather, $2,000.00. My grandmother didn't want that at all! She had the family, you know, and she'd rather he - and that winter he got killed in the woods.

Mc How did that happen?

F I don't know. I suppose a tree fell on him, or something, which it does a lot of times you know.

Mc How ironic that was.

F That's right. Then she wished, naturally, that he would have had the $2,000. and he might have been alive if he went through the War. Evidently that must have been the Civil War.

Mc Then on your mother's side, you were related to the Tanner's that were pioneers. (Yes). The Wilsons, somewhere back in there, intermarried into the Tanner family. (That's right).

Mc Where did you first attend school?

F Right here on this Bates Road, in a one-room schoolhouse, of course, about a mile down the road.

Mc Do you have any particular memories?

F Well, I stayed there until the sixth grade and then I went to Medina for a couple of years. I finished school in the seventh grade. I passed that, and that was the end of my schooling. Oh, about this school down here: I remember getting there, you know, and sometimes you had to wade through snow. You didn't have no snowplows then, you know. You'd just have to get through the best way you could, to attend school.

Mc You probably walked?

F Oh yes, yes. No place for a horse if you got him there, you know, to keep him. Yeah, had to go by foot.

Mc Was that true of the Medina schools?

F Well, I think my Dad used to take me sometimes. You know it was a little farther. Then in the summers of course if I couldn't ride up, I had a bicycle, you know, and when it was good I could ride that bicycle too; see.

Mc When the weather was right.

F That's right, and the roads were alright.

Mc Do you remember any of your teachers?

F My gosh, I can't. One of them was named Lottie Wells. My wife's got the whole list of them there. (See section II of this transcript).

Mc Where was the school in Medina located at that time?

Right practically where it is now. They called it Academy then.

Mc Okay; now will you tell us what your wife's name was?

F Lula Corner. We didn't live very far apart and we met, I guess,

when we were little kids. I don't know when it was, the first we met; do you? (spoken to his wife, sitting in the room).

Mc Okay; you said she lived nearby. Where did she live?

F On the Portage Road; just around the corner! (laughter). She had three sisters: Mable C. Kenward, Pearle Corner Gotts and Inez C. Hickey.

Mc So actually there were four "Corners", right?

F Yeah, four "Corners". (laughter)

Mc You had an uncle.. what was his name?

F Truman Wilson. He was my mother's brother of course. He never married and he lived with us, here, until he died.

Mc Was he the one who said something about the corners?

F Oh, that was my wife's uncle: Albert Hagerman. He said, "Here's the Fox coming around the Corner"! (laughter).

Mc So, you were childhood friends and eventually ramance developed?

F That's right.

Mc You used to have some social times around here, didn't you?

F Yeah, square dances, house parties. Used to be a lot idfferent than it is now. You know, neighbors would get together and have these parties; maybe a dance and a lunch. My uncle used to be quite a violinist and he'd fiddle to all these parties, you know, for a couple of dollars a night. He'd play there all night 'till three or four o'clock in the morning.

Mc He was a fiddler?

F Yeah, a very good one too!. We've still got his violin. We got it all fixed up the other day here, no too long ago, to preserve it. It's a wonderful piece of instrument you know. It's got quite a lot of age to it, but that, they say, helps them. They say they're better, you know, with age. It's got a swell tone!

Mc What would the dance be like, in those days?

F Well, there was square dances, waltzes and two-steps. A lot different, I suppose, than they have now.

Mc No disco?

F No, it wouldn't be disco! (laughter).

Mc Where would the dance be held?

F Right here.

Mc You mean in the house?

F Yeah, or in the barn. At one time I guess we had at least a couple of barn dances, when the barn was in pretty good shape; floors was

good and everything; we'd hold it in the barn.

Mc And sometimes you'd have them in the house too?

F Oh yes, quite often. Oh yeah, that's where they'd be mostly held.

Mc You probably had something to eat?

F Oh yeah. A little lunch would have to go along with it.

Mc When you got through school, what did you do for a living?

F Farmed. Come right here and worked ever since until, you know, I retired here.

Mc How large a farm was this?

F 106 acres. We had a hired man that lived right here, in with us. Hired him by the month them days, you know.

Mc What kind of pay did a hired man get in those days?

F $30.00 a month. That was about the tops and that's what I remember paying; the last I had. Thirty dollars a month and room and board of course.

Mc Do you remember the names of the men who worked for you?

F Yes. Arthur Lake was the name of one of them; Eddie Wasnock was one. You maybe know him?

Mc Did he live near-by?

F Yeah.

Mc In those real early days you probably needed some extra help?

F Oh yes, when the harvest time came; oh yes! Tomatoes and picking apples, you know, you'd have to. And I know sometimes I'd hire them piece work. Most generally that kind of work. By the barrel. Of course apples was in barrels in them days, you know, as I remember it. And you'd hire them to pick by the barrel. Tomatoes they'd pick by the basket, you know. So much a basket. That's the way that worked out.

Mc Where would you find people to help?

F Well as far as picking apples, there was generally people coming along at that time of year looking for work. Migrants I guess you would call them, from the south back to the north. That's what I'd get for the apple picking. For the tomatoes, I know there was a fellow by the name of George Bacon; lived over on the other road over there. He would pick my tomatoes. He would, you know, take sort of a contract to pick them. He'd do most of the picking with a little of my help probably.

Mc In the days before you got migrant help, where did you get your help from?

F Well, outside of the harvest time I wouldn't need anything; only the hired man that I had, see. He took care of everything pretty good.

Mc Did you have, well, they used to call them hoboes?

F Yes; that's what you'd call them in those days. Yeah, and they usually were pretty good help too; most of them. Of course that was sort of their life. They'd come here and then they'd go back south. And it wasn't new work to them because they experienced and understood their work pretty good.

Mc What kind of living accomodations did you have for them ?

F Well, I don't know. They didn't live in here with us. I just forget you know. ...

Mc Would you find some of them in your haymow once in awhile?

F Yeah, I'd find some of them in the barn. I found a fellow in there one morning when I first went out to milk. My land, he was - of course he had his clothes on; what he had. And his shoes was frozen! Froze right down on him almost Yeah, ice!

Mc You have mentioned apples and tomatoes. Did you have any cows on the farm?

F Oh yeah. I never used to keep a big lot of them. About eight or nine or something like that. Seven or eight, and sold milk from them. ... They were mostly Holsteins.

Mc Who did you sell your milk to?

F One fellow was Alvin Eskelson. He was a dealer and I used to draw the milk to him. That's the only one I can think of that I sold to. Well, Charlie Ward! There's another one. I used to take milk to him some too. He lived up on the hill here. He peddled milk too and he didn't have enough for his customers, so maybe a year or two I sold to him; you know.

Mc Did both of those men have routes in Medina?

F Yeah, that's right.

Mc Did you have any horses?

F Yes, I used to keep at least four and sometimes five. Generally have a couple of teams you know, and then what we call a driving horse, for the buggy here or the cutter or something a little

lighter maybe. Not for working too much. Well I also, sometimes I had mules instead of the horses, you know. I had a span of mules at one time, and horses.

Mc Were mules better for working than horses?

F Well, they were pretty tough and they would stand a little more than a horse would; and eat less!

Mc What about the other live-stock? Did you usually have pigs?

F A couple for our own use.

Mc How about chickens?

F Oh maybe 35 or 40; something like that, you know. Of course we'd sell a few eggs too; but not no great big flock.

Mc Can you tell us anything about your first tractor?

F Yes. It was iron wheels. A Ford. The first one, and it cost me $600.00 brand new. I thought that was, you know, quite a price. My brother-in-law was a salesman for tractors and cars them days. I went in the place one day (his name was Harley Britt) and I says,"You got anything here in the line of a used tractor, Harley, that I could have? My horses are getting kind of tired and I would like a tractor to do my heavier work." He says, "You don't want no used tractor! Get yourself a new one!" "Well", I says,"I don't know."Six hundred dollars was a lot of money them days, you know. "Well", he says, "Go ahead. We'll take care of that." So I got the new tractor and boy, was I proud of that! It was a pretty good tractor too.

Mc Have you any idea when that would have been; what year?

F It would probably be in the late twenties 'cause I know the next one I had was a rubber tired one and sits out there by the barn. It's done me ever since. That has been a good one too; another Ford. That was a '43 new, see. So the other one had been worn out by that time. So it must have been probably, I would say in the late twenties. Somewhere along in there.

Mc I suppose you could plow more acerage a day with your tractor? What would you estimate you could plow with your team of horses?

F One and a half acres. That's about the limit. If you had pretty good plowing, loose ground instead of sod, you might shove them to pretty near two acres a day. But with a tractor of course you do twice as much because you have a two-bottom plow. Now they've got seven or eight bottom plows! But I'm telling you, when I got that I thought I had it made. You know that took a lot of heavy work

off of the horses and man too, of course; sit on the tractor. You wouldn't have to walk behind and follow them.

Mc Tomatoes was one of your big crops, for a long time?

F Yes, I most generally growed some tomatoes.

Mc I guess that during the first World War you had trouble getting enough help. Did you put your wife to work then?

F Well, she helped, I'm telling you! Setting tomatoes and fertilizing them. You had to fertilize by hand; take a handful and go around the plants. Every plant, that way, after they was set. Well, I'll tell you there was quite a shortage of food at that time too, if you remember. This country had to feed the countries over there; you remember that. Of course I told you that once in the War that I had to be drafted and examined and everything. But they left me alone on the farm here to harvest the crops, see, until November. And then the War was over. Otherwise I'd of had to went too. You remember how the Germans was taking the shiploads of produce going over there to England and everywhere. And all they could do was feed them. That's the reason they kept me on the farm I suppose. Just as important as it was to go over there, wasn't it? 'Cause you couldn't fight on an empty stomach.

Mc To whom would you sell your tomatoes?

F Well, there was a canning factory here: Birdseye; and then Heinz too. I sold them at different places some years you know. Not all at the same place.

Mc Did you grow beans?

F Oh yeah. White pea beans.

Mc Would you sell those to Heinz?

F No, they generally went to J. J. Jackson in Middleport. There was a Bean House there that bought... I got a pretty good price one day for a load of beans. I guess there was a shortage around the country, you know, and there was a pretty good price up here: eleven cents, and that's about where it is now. I sent a load up there and it came to eleven hundred dollars. He said that was the biggest check he ever sent out for a load of beans. And that come from here! I used to have pretty good luck growing beans. I had good land for that, and climate too.

F I didn't have to use much fertilizer either. It seemed to grow pretty good without it. Now-a-days you know, they think nothing of four or five hundred pounds of fertilizer; maybe six or eight. But I think in those dats I put on maybe a hundred and fifty or two hundred, and that would be a lot, I thought. Sometimes, not any. And I'd get a good crop of beans.

Mc What about pesticides and spraying?

F Wll, you had to spray apples of course, maybe a couple or three times. You had to spray 'em early in the spring, I know, for what they called scale. Do you remember that? Scale? They used to spray 'em with lime and sulphur for that. Then later of course, for the worms. You'd have to use arsnic of lead, and other things in there; poison.

Mc Who would you sell your apples to?

F Well, that's kind of a question because there were different places I sold 'em to. Charlie Dye was one man that would buy them. You remember Charlie Dye storage, here in town.

Mc Would you sell some to Heinz factory?

F Drops generally went to Heinz for vinegar and cider. The pick-ups off the ground, you know. There'd always be plenty of them by the time you got them picked. Or if you got a little wind, there'd be a lot of them falling. (sold to the Hoffman Mill sometimes).

Mc You packed the apples in barrels?

F Yeah; that was quite early in my days here. They went in barrels then. Then I would deliver. I know one time I would deliver 'em up to the canal, the dock they had, and loaded them on the boats, after they was xxx packed in these barrels and headed up. You had to be pretty fair about that; for shipping, see. I guess some of them went across to England. You'd have to deliver them. That was in horse and buggy days, of course. I'd have what they called a barrel rack on the wagon.

Mc Mr. Fox, you probably had to have ice in your house. Where would you get that, in the early days here?

F From the abandoned quarry up here. It used to be Charlie Ward's farm. The Wakefield's are there now, and that was where the quarry was and is. Where they swim - that's the one. I think it used to be called the McCormick Quarry 'cause they was the original people there.

Mc Did you ever watch them cut it?

F Oh yeah. The neighbors would go together kind of and cut ice. Like threshing and everything like that. You know, we didn't spend much money for help. You'd just help one another then. We'd go there when the ice got the thickness that we needed. We'd go there with an ice saw.

Mc You'd do it yourself?

F Oh yeah. Drive the team right out there on the ice and drag it right out of the water with ice hooks; load it on the sleigh and bring it home and put it in the ice-house. Pack it in sawdust, of course. It had to have sawdust.

Mc Did each farm have its own icehouse?

F Well everybody that sold milk, I suppose. They had to have it in the summer time; some way of cooling. They didn't have no other refigerator, or ice boxes in them days.

Mc Has water ever been any problem on your farm? The availibity of it.

F No, there was always plenty of water. We always had pretty good wells here, but you had to pump it by hand. You didn't have no electric pumps in those days. You had to stand for the cattle and the horses, and everything, you know. Stand there for maybe hours, to fill the tub up, you know, for the day.

Mc That was really a major operation, wasn't it?

F Well, it was, I'll tell you. Then you had to carry it into the house for your house use. There wasn't anything piped in them days. It was all done the other way. The cattle , I'd let out to drink in the trough. But the horses, I'd lead 'em out one at a time to drink, see. So I'm telling you the old way took time. But then they was plenty of it in those days, I guess. Nobody seemed to be in too much of a rush.

Mc You'd work long hours.

F Oh yes, I guess you did! From sun up until as long as you could see.

Mc In the summer-time, that was quite a long time.

F Many a day your working day was ten hours, instead of eight, you know. It was from seven 'til six.

Mc Well, that was for the man working in the factories.

F Yes; farmer's hours was different. Longer yet. I know if I used my hired man, he would always say if the harvest come he could

he could stay a little later, well that would be alright. Nothing ever said, you know, about the extra hours at all. No extra time for extra hours in those days. Everybody was contented more, it seemed like.

Mc Quite a change.

F An awful change I'm telling you. I don't know. If it keeps on going that way, I don't know what will happen; do you? It's hard to tell. Nobody knows.

Mc Could you, or did you use rain water in your household?

F Yeah, we got a cistern. Still got it and still use too. You can't beat soft water for a lot of things. It's pretty good.

Mc In the earlier times, how would you get the water out of your cistern?

F A hand pump. Pump set right in the kitchen then. You didn't have to carry. Right over the cistern, see. Just a little pump about that high (demonstrates), with a handle. You just pumped it like you would an outdoor well.

Mc This water was used for washing your hands and doing the dishes?

F Yeah. Well, on the stove you would have a reservoir that would hold probably four or five gallons. Keep that filled up and that would keep your water warm, right from your range there.

Mc How did you heat your house?

F Stoves. Set right here and maybe one of them in the dining room too. Two of them besides the kitchen stove. They'd burn either coal or wood. That's the way we had 'em, you know, because we had quite a lot of wood in them days, from the apple orchards. You'd trim the apple orchard every winter. They'd have a big buzz pile in the spring to cut up for wood for your stoves. Besides that, we had to buy coal too.

F Who would you buy coal from in Medina?

F Jack Barber was one coal dealer and another was Rowley. I can remember paying $14.00 a ton. I think that was the most I ever paid here for hard coal.

Mc How would you get the coal?

F Go up with a team and a wagon. They'd dump it on (the wagon) and you'd bring it home and shovel it off and put it into the bin; wherever you wanted it. That's the way I had to get it. But just

think of it now, but the other day it was $75.00 a ton! Whew!

Mc Some different now. I suppose in those early days you didn't have electricity on the farm?

F No! No, didn't have no electricity. Land, no. It was a long time before we got that. Before they even got the line down through here.

Mc Have you any idea about when?

F I can't tell you but it was after WW II, probably in the 1920's.

Mc In the early days, before running water and all that, you probably didn't have a bathroom either?

F No.

Mc So you had an out-house?

F Yeah, that's right.

Mc Well, a lot of the younger generation doesn't know anything about an outhouse.

F No, they wouldn't know how to get to an outhouse. They wouldn't know what you were talking about, would they?

Mc Could you describe the one that you had?

F We've still got it. Of course we don't use it. It's pretty well growed up with bushes all around it, and vines and everything. But it's still there. It was built probably the same time as the house was. It was built by a carpenter, you know. It wasn't just a thing that was throwed together. It was pretty well built. It was a four-holer, with one little hole.Like we talked about the other day.

Mc Wouldn't it be difficult for small children to use the outhouse?

F Well, on these different size holes, there was a step built right there. It would probably be this high and the step would be about this high. So a little kid could use it. Well, we had to go there pretty young I'm telling you. You didn't have no other place. We were trained, you know.

Mc I don't suppose they had toilet paper?

F Never heard of it! Never heard of it!

Mc What did you do (use) ?

F The Sears and Roebuck book! (laughter) That's right.

Mc It came in handy in more ways than one!

F That's right. After you looked it over a little, you took it out

there; and there it is. What else could you do? You couldn't go and buy toilet paper 'cause they didn't have it. Supposing the people had to go back to them days; what would they do? They'd die, wouldn't they?! I think they would. They couldn't take it. Well, I'm glad to hope that they never have to.

Mc Let's go back to your family life a little bit. You said that your wife's name (maiden name) was Lula Corner. When were you married?

F We was married in Medina, December 17, 1913 at the Baptist parsonage there. The minister's name was VanOstran. Her sister, Pearle Corner Gotts and her husband Harry Gotts were our attendants. That was all we had.

Mc What about children?

F Well, we had just one daughter (the only child), Anna Mae.

Mc Can you tell us a little bit about Anna Mae.

F Well, she went to Brockport College, and after that she taught for 25 years I think. I see the other day that in the paper (Medina Journal Register) somebody says 25 years she taught. She taught some down here where we went to school, and where she went to school. Then she went to town (Medina) and taught. You probably remember her in Medina?

Mc I taught in the Medina school system with her, yes.Well, she taught out in the country school here before centralization, and then went into Medina? (Yes).

Mc Saturday nights used to be kind of a big night in town. What would you do when you went into town on Saturday night?

F Well, generally you'd get your groceries for the week, see. That's the time you had to shop. You didn't take a day off to go and do it. You took the Saturday evening and you know, got your groceries and stuff for the next week.

Mc They didn't have super-markets in those days.

F No, oh no!

Mc Do you remember any of the grocery stores by name?

F I remember Cooper had a store.

Mc Often they had separate stores for meat.

F Oh yes, most generally. You couldn't go into a meat market and buy groceries, or vice verse you know. It would be either meat or groceries. Yeah.

Mc What about getting your hair cut; did you like to get it cut on Saturday night too?

F Yeah, I imagine so. A lot of times I suppose you did.

Mc Did you get a shave too?

F No, I generally shaved myself. I don't think I ever had a barber. I guess the barbers don't shave no more, I hear.

Mc Do you have any particular memories of the great Depression that began in 1929? How it affected you?

F Well, we just about went broke, that's all I can tell you. We didn't get no price for anything. The market wasn't good on any crop that you could raise. You'd have a pretty good crop of some= thing and come market time, why, you didn't say what you wanted. You'd take what they'd give you, or else keep it! And in order to pay your bills all summer, you had to pretty near, as you might say, give it to them for that little money that they would give you, to pay your bills and taxes. I know one year we had, I think we had three or four cows and a steer that we was going to butcher for the meat for the winter. And we had to sell the whole bunch of them in order to pay the taxes. They didn't let the taxes go in them days like some of them do now, you know; pile up. We paid 'em one way or another, the best way we could.

Mc Did you have any experience when the Medina banks were closed?

F Well, yes we did.

Mc Did you lose some (money) on there?

F We didn't. And the way that we lost it is because we owed them. It wasn't because we borrowed it out of there. It was because we owed 'em, and then we had to dig it up. Then when they owed you, you didn't get it! But when you owed them, they got it! Remember? I know!!

Mc But, living on a farm, you probably didn't go hungry?

F Oh no. We had plenty to eat.

Mc You could get your food, anyway.

F Yeah. If we didn't we'd be crazy, wouldn't we? It was not only meat and potatoes, but the chickens and everything. The vegetables, of course. You didn't have to buy much; only coffee and sugar and flour and stuff like that. I'd take wheat, sometimes, to the mill and trade for the flour.

Mc Barter, almost?

F My wife would bake, bread and everything. Didn't go to town to

buy bread. Baked it right here. We put in 20 or 25 bushel of potatoes, and cleaned them up all that winter. You know, with the hired help. We'd all eat pretty good, them days, that many potatoes. Now a bushel of potatoes will do us all winter. That's the difference. We don't eat nothing like that.

Mc Do you remember your first automobile?

F I think my first automobile was a Maxwell. It was a pretty good car I guess. I thought it was in them days. I kept it 'til it got pretty well dilapidated before I changed. And I forget what I got after that.

Mc Have you any idea about what year you got the Maxwell?

F Well, it was quite awhile after we was married. I couldn't tell you what year.

Mc It was probably after World War I ?

F Oh yes. After that.

Mc Speaking of WW I, do you have any memories, other than what you have mentioned, about a possible draft and how you were needed on the farm? Like Armistice Day? Do you have any memories of that? Did you go down and watch the troops leave by train... ?

F No, I don't think we did. I don't remember.

Mc Mr. Fox, you have done other things besides farming, especially as you got older and wanted to retire. What occupations have you been engaged in?

F Well, I did paint some houses in my day. And carpenter work. That was about the size of it.

Mc You delivered mail for a little while?

F Yes. That was when I was still farming. That was before I got into the carpenter business. But I guess in order to make a little more money, and I got a hundred dollars a month. And I had to make two trips. I thought I was making a little money then, see, but now that wouldn't buy the gas would it? Two trips to Lyndonville. From Medina Post Office to Lyndonville Post Office. The Postmaster's name there was George Wright. He was the one that hired me. I don't know how that come, but that's the way it was.

Mc Your farm was originally about 106 acres, and when you wanted to retire you sold most of it off. To whom did you sell the land?

F Well, we sold a lot of it to Andy Curtis. John Pettit got the

rest of it. Two different parcels of land, at separate times.

Mc When you went into carpentry, who taught you how to do that?

F Duane Harris. I worked with him for a number of years. Probably three or four; then he retired and I kept on a-going.

Mc What kind of carpentry; did you build a whole house?

F No, as a rule I didn't. I done a lot of roofing and would maybe build a porch. You know, repair and stuff like that. But my job was mostly roofing. I used to like it. I don't know why, but I did!

Mc Do you have some memories about the fires that took place along the Bates Road area?

F Well, not too much. Only as we said before this one up here that burned the cattle all up was touched off. We know that. I remember that very good. It was the McCormick farm but Charlie Ward owned it then. He was the milk-man that I told you I sold the milk to.

Mc Do you think that fire was arson?

F We knew it was because they found the fellow down here on the corner of the Scott Road. Dead. Yeah, shot himself. You remember that, don't you? The guy that set the barn a-fire, shot himself. So that's how they know it was him. He evidently had a grudge against the fellow that had the horses there, we think. That is what our opinion is, see. He wanted to get back at him and get rid of his horses and in order to do that, he cleaned the whole works up. Beautiful barns too. It was all finished off like a house would be. I've seen them before they was burned up.

Mc What else caused the fires around here?

F We had a fire right here at one time. Burned up a kennel of dogs. That was kind of a deal, you know.

Mc On this farm?

F Yeah, right here. My daughter had dogs, and raised some. The thing got a-fire. She had a stove in there and we suppose it overheated. My wife got up one night and saw it (the building) burning. You couldn't do anything about it. It was just gone. I stood there in the back door and watched it burn and I guess she seen it out the window. That was quite an experience too. I'm telling you, we felt pretty bad about that. And our daughter did too. Quite valuable dogs. But that wasn't the point. It was being burned.

Mc Lightning caught some barns on fire quite easily (also)?

F Yes, it did. Seemed to be more them days than now. I don't know

why that is; do you?

Mc Well, I don't know whether they didn't have lightning rods or not.

Mc I would like to ask you, Mrs. Fox; of course as a farmer's wife you had a lot of things to do to try to help out. I guess you did some baking at one time? Can you tell us about that?

Mrs. F Well, I did a lot of baking in my life, that's for sure. I baked bread at least twice a week just for our house here. Then once in awhile a birthday cake or something like that. I did make fried cakes and sold friedcakes and cookies to different people. I delivered them.

Mc Did they give you an order over the 'phone or something? Then you'd bake and deliver them?

Mrs. F Yes. I didn't do too much.

Mc Well, there's been a lot of changes in your lifetime Mr. Fox.

F Oh yes, I guess so! I think of a lot of things that happened. Probably some of them didn't amount to anything, and yet maybe they would be interesting.

Mc Thank you for this interview Mr. Fox.

F You are welcome, I'm sure.

* *

The transcription of this tape was done by Luther Burroughs, Albion. Editing and final typing was completed by Helen McAllister, Medina.

SONNET TO A BACKHOUSE

by Inez Corner Hickey December 20, 1937

...ien memory keeps me company and moves to smiles or tears
A weather beaten object looms thru the mist of years
Behind the house or barn it stood, a few steps or more
And hurrying feet, a path had made, straight to its swinging door
Its architecture was a type of simple classic art
But in the tradegy of life, it played a leading part.
And oft the passing traveler drove slow and heaved a sigh
To see the modest hired girl slip out with glances shy.
We had our posy garden that the women loved so well
I loved it too, but better still I loved the stronger smell -
That filled the evening breezes so full of homely cheer
And told the nites er-taken tramp that human life was near
On lazy August afternoons it made a little bower
Delightful where my grandsire sat and whiled away an hour.
For there the summer morning, its very cares entwined
And berry bushes reddened in the streaming soil behind.
All day fat spiders spun their webs to catch the buzzing flies
That flitted to and from the house where Ma was baking pies.
And once a swarm of hornets bold had built a palace there
And stung my unsuspecting Aunt - I must not tell you where!
Then father took a flaming pole - that was a happy day
It nearly burned the building up but the hornets left to stay.
When summer bloom began to fade and winter to carouse
We banked the little building with a heap of hemlock boughs
But when the crust was on the snow and the sullen skies were gray
In sooth the building was no place where one could wish to stay
We did our duites promptly, there one purpose swayed the mind
We tarried not, nor lingered long on what we left behind.
The torture of that icy seat could make a Spartan sob
For needs must scrape the gooseflesh with a lacerating cob
That from a frost encrusted nail was suspended by a string.
My father was a frugal man, and wasted not a thing.
When grandpa had to "go out back" and make his morning call
We'd bundle up the dear old man with muffler and a shawl
I knew the hole on which he sat - twas padded all around
And once I dared to sit there - twas all too wide I found
My loins were all too little and I jack-knifed there to stay.
They had to come and get me or I'd a passed away.
Then father said ambition was a thing that youth should shun
And I must use the children's hole 'til childhood days were done.
But still I marvel at the craft that cut those holes so true
The baby hole and the slender hole that fitted sister Lu. Ha!
That dear old country landmark - I've tramped around a bit
And in the lap of luxury my lot has been to sit.
But ere I die I'll eat the fruit of trees I've robbed of yore
That seek the shanty where my name is carved upon the door.
I miss the old familiar smell, twould sooth my faded soul
I'm now mature but non-the-less I'd try the children's hole.

* *
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This poem was given, to be shared, by Mrs. Fox (Lula Corner Fox).

William and Josias Tanner, brothers from Vermont, came here in the ly I800's, when this territory was nothing more than a wilderness.

ey bought and cleared a tract of land on the south end of what is known as the Culvert Road. There they built a log cabin.

They then returned to Vermont to get their I5 year old sister, Anna, was destined to become the great-grandmother of Wilson Fox.

She left the happy and comfortable home of her parents in a civilized ıtry to accompany her brothers back here to a lonely wilderness, for the pose of careing for them and their new home.

They rode horseback and drove a covered wagon containing a few bare essities including a pair of wooden splint-bottom chairs, one of which Foxes now possess.

On Jan. 24, I822, Anna Tanner married Avery V. Andrews, (Wilson Fox's at-grandfather), who was born in Claremont, N.H., July 25, I798, and at age of 6 or 7 moved with his parents to Waterbury, Vt.

In I8I8 he came with them to Gaines, then Genesee County, N.Y., mplishing the journey on horseback in 30 days.

In I820 he purchased a tract of land, then a total wilderness, north the culvert on what is now known as the Culvert Road.

He built a log cabin with a huge fireplace, bare floors, and simple niture was installed. It was here that he and his wife, Anna, began ir married life.

They traveled from the bride's brother's home, through the woods to ir cabin, by ox-sled, on their wedding day, bringing with them the two int-bottomed chairs and a few other necessities.

Nine children were born to them, 5 of which died.

In the many years that followed, they built a beautiful home on the e, incorporating the original log cabin into a part of it. The home ains today, though many changes have been made in it since the ~~Andrews~~ Andrews ily passed on.

They were married for 55 years, prior to his death in I877.
One of their daughters was Ester J. Andrews who later married Edward ilson, born in I833 in the town of Ridgeway.

Ester and Edward were to be Wilson Fox's grandparents, and the parents Truman and Anna. (Wilson's mother).

Wilson's grandparents on his father's side came here from Germany n his father, William Fox, was just 3 years of age.

They settled in La Salle, near Niagara Falls, and lived there until ir children were grown.

Their German name was Fuch, but was legally changed to Fox after their ival in this country.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Mr. Fox was offered $2000 to go and ht in another's place. Mercenary

At that time, a person that didn't want to go into the army, but was

afted, could pay another to take his place.

Although he wanted to accept the offer of money and go, his wife efused to agree, so, instead he worked cutting trees in the woods, and tree fell on him and killed him.

He was probably only in his forty's at the time, and his wife blamed erself for not allowing him to join the army.

Seven children were born to them before coming to America. Four girls nd three boys.

Three of the girls moved to Idaho where they married and lived out heir lives. One stayed in Niagara Falls.

One of the boys moved to New Jersey, one stayed in Niagara Falls, nd William came here to Orleans County where he sought work with Edward ilson who owned the farm now owned by the Foxes.

He was employed as "hired man" and soon married Edward Wilson's aughter, Anna.

They lived in the present Fox home when Wilson, their only son was born. ust three years after his birth, Anna, his mother died of cancer.

John Andrews, Wilson's great-uncle, was then appointed his guardian.

After Wilson and Lu's marriage, several years later, John Andrews ave them a few of the articles owned by his parents Avery and Anna ndrews, and the Foxes still have most of them.

Lula Corner was born on the Portage Road, ~~the~~ daughter of Thomas orner and Lavina House. She was the third of four daughters: Mabel ~~orner~~(Kenward) Pearle ~~Corner~~(Gotts), Lula, and Inez ~~Corner~~(Hickey).

The girls were nicknamed "The Four Corners", and when Lu and Wilson ere going together, her uncle, Albert Hagerman, enjoyed teasing her about the Fox coming around the Corner".

Wilson and "Lu," as she is known to her friends, grew up neighbors nd attended the Bates Road School which was a one-room school, heated by coal and wood-burning stove. Some of their teachers were Winnie Ford, ose McGwinn, Miss Luella Knickerbocker, and Charlotte Wells.

Since there were no buses in those days, the children had to walk to chool, and many times in the winter, they waded through snow that was aist-deep. Sometimes only two or three would make it to school.

If the roads became impassable, the neighbors would get together nd shovel them out by hand, since there was no road-cleaning equipment n those days.

Lu attended the Bates Road School through the sixth grade, then moved n to the Medina Free Academy, where the Medina High School now stands.

Wilson attended the Bates Road School through grade five, and completed he sixth and seventh grades at the Medina Free Academy.

At the age of about fourteen years, he decided that he would rather ork than attend school, so his father allowed him to quit school and take job.

He worked for Mr. Balch, a neighboring farmer. The pay at the time

aid him seventy-five cents a day, which Wilson considered a great honor.

A common practice in those days was the holding of house parties and ances during the winter months.

Wilson's parents, his father had remarried, held such a party at their ome and Lu attended.

At the end of the evening, Wilson asked if he might take her home. he agreed and he hitched up the horse and cutter and took her. From then n, for nearly the next two years, they "kept company", and on Dec. 17, 1913 hey were married by Rev. Van Nostrand at the Baptist parsonage, with Mr. nd Mrs. Harry Gotts, (Lu's sister Pearle), as attendants.

His parents left the farm and Wilson and Lu took over and have spent heir lives there.

They farmed the 106 acres raising tomatoes and beans and later fruit.

He bought most of his tomato plants at Walter Webster's greenhouse, when they weren't furnished by the factories themselves. (Snyder's Canning Factory and H. J. Heinz Co.).

The highest price he ever received for tomatoes was $14 a ton. This was considered a good price at the time.

In their early days, all farm work was done by hand with the help of horses or mules.

During World War I help was nearly impossible to get, so in the spring when it became necessary for the tomato plants to be set, Wilson and Lu set and fertilized 10 acres alone, by hand.

When they were ready for picking, they did manage to get one man, George Bacon from the Horan Road, to help pick them. Because they were to be sold to the canning factory, they had to be picked at just the right time, neither too ripe, nor too green, or the factory would reject them and pay a lower fee.

They also raised pea beans, and one year received $1100 for one big truck load. The price was 11¢ per pound because of a shortage of beans. They were sold to the Jackson Brother's Warehouse in Middleport.

Apples also formed a large part of their farm with seven acres of trees including Kings, Greenings, Baldwins, Spitzenbergs, Spys, Russets, Harvest apples and Crab apples.

Many apple pickers were required each fall to get the crop in.

After picking, the apples were sorted and packed "just so" in barrels. They had to be "faced" in both the bottom and the top of the barrel. (Faced apples meant stem up.)

They were then loaded on horse-drawn wagons and hauled to Medina to a loading dock on the canal, behind "White's Hotel", which is now where the Medina Parts Store is.

At the dock, they were placed on canal barges, which were drawn by teams of mules to Albany and New York City, and sometimes shipped overseas from there.

Pears were another fruit raised on the farm, and a few trees still remain today in the south-east corner of the farm, and still produce fruit

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4.F.2

In the early years of their marriage, horse and buggy, or sleigh, winter, was the main form of transportation. However, there was a trolley that traveled through Medina, from Buffalo to Rochester, and a few cars.

The Foxes had a very lively driving horse that was afraid of both the trolley and cars, so when they drove to Medina, if the trolley was in sight, Lu stopped on the corner of State and East Center Streets and got out of the buggy until the trolley passed, because the horse would rear up on its hind legs and could overturn the buggy.

She also tells of a time when they drove to Medina with several people in a Bob sleigh, and at the corners of Main and Center Streets, she was thrown out backwards and landed head-first into a snow bank. Her feet were left sticking out and her skirts were thrown back, showing her legs, which in those days was "shocking".

Four boys who were standing on the corner, and witnessed the whole thing, called to her to "Come over here and we'll pick you up!".

On April 29, 1917, their only child, Anna Mae was born. She also attended the Bates Road School, and later finished high school in Medina. She went on to college and became a teacher.

She began her teaching career at the Bates Road School, where she and her parents had begun their education. From there, she taught for a few years, primary through fourth grades, at Shelby Center. She then taught fourth grade for a time at the old Oak Orchard School, in Medina, before deciding to return to college and prepare for her final career of teaching a "Special-Help" class at the new Oak Orchard Elementary School. She continued this work until the tragic illness struck, which claimed her life on June 21, 1962. In all, she had taught in the Medina School System for 25 years.

During her years of growing up, there was never a dull moment for her parents at the farm.

They employed a live-in "hired man" for several years, who worked from 7 A.M. to 6 P.M. for $30 per month and room and board.

WhenLu's oldest sister Mabel's daughter, Naomi, became ill with cancer, they took her in for 14 months preceding her death, and cared for her as though she were their own child. When it became impossible for Lu to care for her, they hired a nurse for her.

Wilson came in every day at 4 P.M. from wherever he was working just to carry the child out to the buggy, so she might ride to Medina with Lu to pick up Anna Mae from school.

She enjoyed the ride, and it was the only way for her to get out, since she was paralized and unable to walk.

Wilson and Lu and other members of their family spent nearly everything they had to try to save Naomi, but nothing could be done and she died at their home at the age of 15.

Maynard Kenward, her brother, also lived with them from age 9 to 16 because his mother, Mabel, had to work. His cousins Ruth and Tom Hickey also spent much time during their childhood with their aunt and uncle. Wilson's uncle, Truman, also lived with them.

In those days, Wilson and Lu were up at 5 A.M. every day, and their work didn't end much before 9 P.M.

There were animals to be cared for, cows to be milked, and Lu had to prepare breakfast for everyone, consisting of bacon or ham and eggs

fried potatoes, pancakes, and usually some form of dessert, such as cookies or fried cakes. A large dinner was also served at noon, which always included meat, potatoes, vegetables, home made bread and butter, and always a dessert such as pie or cake. Supper was served at 6 P.M. and was also a large meal.

In those days bread had to be baked, butter churned, and everything made by hand, with no mixes available to shorten work. Lu even made her own ice cream.

With nine or ten people to feed at each meal, food preparation of such huge proportions, took hours each day.

Most of their food was grown right on the farm, including meat, milk, eggs, and vegetables. They also grew their own wheat for flour.

Wheat cutting took about 3 men and four horses, usually. It was cut with a binder, which bound it into bundles. It was then stacked with the heads up, in shocks, usually 8 or 10 bundles to a shock, depending on the yield. This stacking kept the rain out.

It was then drawn into the barn on a wagon equipped with a hay rack, then stored in the mow of the barn, usually on top of the hay.

Then a traveling thrasher brought his machine to the barn and thrashed the wheat. This took about 12 men, including the four men that traveled with the thrasher.

The other eight men consisted of neighbors who exchanged work with each other.

The four crew members came for breakfast, and they and the other 8 men had dinner and supper at the farm. Their meals usually consisted of ham, baked beans, potatoes, other available vegetables, homemade bread and butter, or sometimes chicken and biscuits, coffee, and generally pie for dinner and cake for supper.

After the wheat was thrashed it was bagged, loaded on wagons and taken to the mill where it was ground into flour.

Wilson took his wheat to the Union Mill, which stood on East Center St. on the Oak Orchard Creek bank where the laundromat and the "Pop Shop" now are.

The farmer usually took his year's supply of wheat flour in exchange for his wheat, plus money for the remainder.

As an afterthought Lu tells of the time, two months after their marriage, when Wilson suffered an attack of appendecitis. Dr. Tarner, their family doctor, didn't approve of operations and spent the night with Wilson trying to bring him out of the attack, but in the morning had to call a surgeon from Buffalo.

While the surgeon was coming by train, an ambulance was sent for Wilson. Because of deep snow, the ambulance couldn't get through and the neighbors had to get out and shovel the road out, while the ambulance followed along behind.

(Prospect & Eagle St.)

They finally arrived at the Medina Hospital where the operation was performed. For three weeks Wilson remained in the hospital under the care of a special nurse, and wasn't allowed to return home until St. Patrick's Day.

In later years when Anna Mae, their daughter, was teaching, she brought

ome an unfortunate girl, and her parents took her in and cared for her for even years.

Still later, after the girl had left, Anna Mae again brought a young oy who needed care, home with her, and her parents, again took him in and ar for him for a while.

They have always had a great love for children and animals, and have ever refused to take in any unfortunates.

Now retired, 86 years of age, and in fairly good health, they enjoy aving their many friends come to call.

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The information contained in SECTION II was prepared by Mr. & Mrs. Wilson Fox and presented to OCHA, ORAL HISTORY PROJECT to suppliment the taped interview.

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