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Orleans County Historical Association

Interview with: MARJORIE FALCONER JOHNSTON, Medina

SUBJECTS

Wheelman's Rest
 bicycles
 pagoda-like summer house
 home-made ice cream
 homestead well
 old oaken bucket & dipper
 Oak Orchard on the Ridge
 Lakeside
 hired man/ apple pickers
 Ho-Jack railroad
 farm animals & pets
 race horse
 the Albion Fair
 trolley car
 Lyndonville school
 basket-boarding
 Albion school
 school sports
 girl's basketball
 football
 vaccinations
 Ashwood
 Kenyonville
 Knowlesville
 Model-T Ford, first car
 * * * * *
 Mildred Olds / Edward Cromwell
 Tom Martin: postal worker

*WWE-end
celebration*

NAMES

James Falconer, father
 Cora Merrill Falconer, mother
~~Maria~~ Falconer Clow, sister
~~Bella~~ Falconer, sister
 William P. Merrill, grandfather
 Guy Merrill, uncle
 Newton Merrill, uncle
 Mr. Sidney Johnston, husband

NAMES & SUBJECTS

Merrill Funeral Home, Albion
 Medina Business School
 Mr. Underhill of Rochester
 Swett Iron Works
 Empire Couch Company
 J. D. Smith
 Gardiner (Gard) Phillips
 Ernest Henner
 Howard Phillips
 Johnston's Linens of Medina
 S. G. Rowley home
 story of "the good horse"
 The Red Onion Hotel
 voice & piano lessons
 Miss Belle Cooper/Mrs. Woodford
 World War I, Armistice & pranks
 knitting for Red Cross & letters

1896-1987



Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Mrs. Marjorie Falconer Johnston
319 Pearl Street
Medina, New York

Mrs. Johnston was born April 1, 1896.

This interview was conducted at 319 Pearl Street by
Helen M. McAllister of Medina, New York.

J Mrs. Johnston

Mc Mrs. 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.

Marjorie F. Johnston
Signed

August 6th, 1979

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Helen M. McAllister

INTERVIEWER

Aug. 6, 1979

Date



WHEELMAN'S REST

- J. I was born in Orleans County on April 1, 1896. My father was James Falconer and my mother was Cora Merrill Falconer. I have two sisters: Maude Falconer Clow and Belle Falconer.
- Mc You said that your mother's father played an important part in your life.
- J Well, I can't tell you too much about him, only that he lived where I was born.
- Mc What was his name?
- J William P. Merrill.
- Mc How did he come to this area?
- J I really don't know. I never even saw my grandfather. It must be way back that he purchased that part of the country (known as the Oregon section) and cleared some of it. That is in Orleans County. That would be located north and east of Oak-Orchard-on-the-Ridge.
- Mc Would you have some idea of when he might have come into that area?
- J Oh I have no idea.
- Mc Did he build the house in which you lived?
- J I hardly think he did. I think part of the house must have dated way back. From the structure of the walls, it must have been very old. Then when my mother was a young girl, he added onto the house.
- Mc Were there many children?
- J My mother had two brothers: Newton and Guy.
- Mc What did your grandfather do; was he a farmer?
- J He must have been a farmer from all that I know. Sort of a handy farmer I think, from the buildings around on the farm. They evidently would shoe their own horses back at that time; do many things like that.
- Mc How large a farm would you say he had?
- J Just about 68 acres; more or less a fruit farmer. When I was a small child there were lots of apple trees and grafted with most any kind of fruit there was, I guess. All kinds of apples.
- Mc In talking about your homestead, when was the addition built on?
- J That was when my mother was 12 years old.
- Mc Your mother grew up in that house too?

J That's right. She was born there.

Mc Mrs. Johnston, how did your mother and father meet? Where did your mother live at the time?

J She was living in Albion at the time.

Mc Her parents had decided to move away from the farm?

J I don't know just exactly her age when they moved into town, whether it was when she got up into high school, or when it was. They left their farm and moved into Albion.

Mc Do you know what your grandfather did for a living then?

J I suppose he was always a farmer.

Mc When she was a young lady then, your mother met the man who was to become her husband? What did he do at that time?

J He was teaching in a country school at that time; at Kenyonville, I know. I don't know what other schools.

Mc How did they happen to go back out to the homestead?

J Well, when my father and mother were married, my grandfather gave them the farm. So that meant he was going to be a farmer instead of a teacher.

Mc Your father evidently was familiar with farming before that?

J Well, he was raised on a farm; so that helped.

Mc Did your grandparents come back and live with them?

J Oh no! No, they lived in Albion from then on.

Mc Were your grandparents related to the Merrills of the Merrill Funeral Home (in Albion)?

J Distantly.

Mc When were your parents married?

J I would estimate 1884, and they were probably married in Albion.

Mc So, your parents moved back to the homestead, your father was a farmer and two daughters were born before you.

Mc The major focus of this interview brings back pleasant memories to a great many people, Mrs. Johnston. Will you tell us as much as you can about Wheelman's Rest.

J As far as I know it was about a half-way point between Medina and Lakeside (near Oak-Orchard-on-the-Ridge). Many people rode their bicycles; I think more adults than children. It would be a pretty long ride for children, to Lakeside (from Albion or Medina).

Wheelman's Rest started in by the cyclists stopping and asking if they could rest, and have some refreshments. It was usually a cookie and a glass of milk to start with; later it was pop and ice cream. There was a little summer-house, pagoda-like, that stuck out over the bank of Oak Orchard Creek. It made a nice place for people to go in and eat their ice cream.

Mc Tell me about the ice cream. Where did they get it; how was it made?

J Of course it was home-made at that time. My folks made it. Everything was home-made; cookies were home-made.

Mc Where did they keep the ice cream to keep it frozen?

J I suppose they kept it right in the ice cream freezer, as they used to do. They would pack the ice with salt. The more salt they put in, the colder it was. So it kept frozen.

Mc Where did your folks get the ice?

J The ice came from the creek in the wintertime. Being that we were right on the bank of the creek made it very handy for my father to harvest the ice in the wintertime. He had a place in back of the barn that was filled with sawdust where he used to put the ice.

Mc Do you remember turning the crank to help make the ice cream?

J Oh no. I was only four or five years old at that time. I don't remember anything about it.

Mc Were your parents the ones that thought up the name of Wheelman's Rest?

J Evidently, or else some of the people that came along. Perhaps they named it because it was a place to rest.

Mc When you were describing the little building earlier, I think you said that part of it had a roof over it?

J The little summer house? It did; Japanese style. Just thin plywood, and a railing around it; benches and rough chairs, sort of hickory type chairs inside. ... I would say that it was at least 20 feet wide.

Mc My husband and I were driving around that area recently and found that the mailbox still says Wheelman's Rest. I think that you have told me that part of the bank overlooking Oak Orchard Creek has fallen away?

J Yes it has receded quite a bit. There was a big sign. I remember that being out in the barn. It must have been a sign at least

15 feet long that had Wheelman's Rest on it. Evidently that was fastened up in the trees somewhere.

Mc Now the entire area is called Wheelman's Rest, isn't it?

J Well, a lot of people just know that corner by the name of Wheelman's Rest and I think they don't even know why. It is a location.

Mc Do you remember your mother or sisters baking cookies?

J Not at that time, no.

Mc Would you tell us about the well at the homestead?

J There was a well that was hand dug, laid up with stone as they used to do, back in the stoop of the house. That was the front porch and that recessed back in toward the dining room. The well was 32 feet deep and the water was very good and always icy cold. A lot of people always liked to get a drink out of the well. It was always kept with the old oaken bucket that went with it. So that added interest too.

Mc Was there a dipper for them to drink out of?

J Oh yes, sure. (chuckles)

Mc Was this well covered?

J No, it was an open well with a high curbing around it, maybe three feet high.

Mc What was that made out of?

J Wood. Of course the, I don't know what you call it, what you'd crank it up by, was across the curbing of it.

Mc Mrs. Johnston, did your father have hired help?

J He always had a hired man. Sometimes he lived in the house, depending on the man, because there was an outside building with four or five rooms in it that we always kept apple pickers in during the fall. They were fed in the house but they slept in this building. Sometimes the year-'round hired man lived in this place.

Mc What kind of animals did your father have?

J He had the normal amount of pigs and horses and he had quite a few cows; sometimes as many as 25 cows. He shipped the milk to Niagara Falls; that went on the Ho-Jack (railroad) from Ashwood.

Mc What kind of cows did he have?

J Just milk cows; I think mostly Holstein.

Mc Did you ever have any pets?

J We always had dogs and cats, and any wild animal that we could train. One sister had a pet goat at one time. He was tame with her but not with me! (chuckles) So I was usually absent when he was loose outside.

Mc Your father had horses to help on the farm; did he ever have a horse that he might have raced?

J He had a driving horse that was very good, so he had this horse bred and he developed a nice racing horse. He was entered in the races one fall at the Albion Fair. The sad part of it was, the horse was poisoned. Back in those days you trusted everybody; didn't lock the barn like they do today.

Mc When you are talking about a race horse, would it be the kind of race where you'd ride the horse, or a sulky?

J No, it was sulky, harness races.

Mc Did he ever win?

J Well, he proved very good that first time. Enough so that it made somebody jealous evidently. The way it looked anyway.

Mc The horse wasn't poisoned at the Fair was he?

J Oh no. I think it was around New Year's time.

Mc Mrs. Johnston, while we're talking about horses, would you tell the story about the neighbor with the "good horse"?

J There was a neighbor that used to stay too long at a little-old-hotel, what they called the Red Onion, at Ashwood. Whether somebody would put him in the buggy, it hardly seems that he was able to get in by himself, but the horse used to come up past our place and around the corner and take the man home. Lots of times the man was down in the bottom of the buggy. I suppose when he got home, the wife took care of the horse and the man too!

Mc When you started going to school, where did you go?

J We had a little country school nearby, very near. I finished the grades in Lyndonville school.

Mc How did you get to school?

J With a horse and buggy. Stayed through the week in the winter-time.

Mc Was that called basket-boarding?

J Yeah.

Mc What did you do with the horse and buggy?

J Well, when it was good weather you could always tie a horse in a church shed somewhere.

Mc Did they have drive-barns there for you to put the horse in?

J No, I think we always put it in a church shed. The school is still right next to the Methodist church, so there were sheds in the back with plenty of room for the horses.

Mc After attending the Lyndonville school, where did you go?

J At that time my eldest sister graduated from high school and had to go to Training Class. The nearest was in Albion, so all three of us went to Albion school.

Mc Did you stay in Albion?

J We stayed, basket-boarded, in Albion. I started in high school and my next to the oldest sister graduated from high school that year.

Mc What year did you graduate from Albion High School?

J 1916.

Mc Did you ride the trolley much in those years?

J Oh yes. That was in progress at that time. We could take the trolley at Knowlesville, and that would take us right into Albion. We always came home on week-ends.

Mc While you were in school, did you take a business course?

J No, it was the regular course. It was a Latin-Scientific course because they taught no other languages in Albion at that time.

Mc Did that mean that you'd take the sciences?

J Well, it meant that I had to go through high school on Latin; all the way through.

Mc You have said that you were interested in singing.

J I took voice lessons through high school, and took part in any musicals they had in the high school. There were six of us that used to be called on to render something at times.

Mc Do you remember any of the songs, or any of their names?

J No, that's too far back now.

Mc You have said that you took piano lessons too?

J I always played the piano, I guess from the time I was about five years old.

Mc Do you remember your piano teacher's name?

J The last I took was from Mrs. Woodford in Knowlesville. I even took (lessons) from Belle Cooper, way back when I was about 11 years old, I guess. I think she just started about that time. She only lived a mile east of us.

Mc Did they have special music in school, such as chorus?

J Well, they didn't stress music like they do now.... No marching band.

Mc Mrs. Johnston, what about sports in the Albion school. Did the girls participate?

J Well, there was always a girl's basketball team. We wore flowing bloomers, you know, holding you down. Couldn't play very hard with those on!

Mc Bloomers and white midddy tops?

J Oh yes. And I remember the bloomers went way out to here (laughs). That, I think, was my last year in high school, when they first had a football team in Albion, in 1916.

Mc All of the boys were able to play?

J Oh yes.

Mc Did they play other schools nearby?

J Yes, Medina was a big rival, of course.

Mc Did they have cheer-leaders, to start with?

J I don't recall that they did; no.

Mc Was there a cafeteria in the school?

J No cafeteria. There were places where they could eat their lunch if they brought it. We usually went to where we boarded, and had our lunch there.

Mc What about illness in the school; was there a school nurse on duty?

J No, no nurse at all.

Mc Or doctor?

J I don't remember having any examinations for anything in school.

Mc Did you have to be vaccinated before going to school?

J No, never.

Mc Do you remember being concerned about polio or small-pox?

J No, that was more when I was out of school; afterward. I think there was kind of a scare, I don't remember whether it was scarlet fever or typhoid fever, but they thought everyone should be vaccinated then. But they weren't all vaccinated.

Mc Were you vaccinated?

J No, because the doctor we went to said, "Wait until the teachers are all vaccinated!" (laughter)

J After I graduated in 1916, I stayed at home for two years and kept on studying the piano. There were a few youngsters from the neighborhood that I taught; got them started on the piano. Then my Uncle Guy thought that I should go to business school. My father wasn't worried about it. I don't think that my mother was at the time, very much. But Uncle Guy influenced her to think that I should become a stenographer.

Mc Where was the business school that he wanted you to attend?

J There was a Business School in Medina. Mr. Underhill, from Rochester, had come and started the Business School.

Mc Where was that located?

J That was up over Curvin's Store (on Main Street, Medina).

Mc What did they teach at the Business School?

J Shorthand and typewriting.

Mc How long would that course be?

J Well, I remember that I went all winter; about a year.

Mc Did you commute to your home, or did you basket-board again?

J Well, that year I boarded in Albion for the fun of it, with people that I knew, and went back and forth on the trolley. There were three other girls from Albion, that went to the Business School at the same time, that I knew. One was Doctor Whittier's daughter. She lived in Albion but I think she lives in Angola now. Then there's another one lives down near Rochester somewhere. I know she's alive but I haven't seen her for years. I think the third one died recently.

- J After I completed my Business School training, I went to Swett Iron Works to work. I was there for two or three years, then I left. They were advertising for a girl at the Empire Couch Company, which was a furniture factory. So I went there to work. That was a better job.
- Mc How long were you there?
- J I think about 15 years.
- Mc Who were the three men who ran the Empire Couch Company?
- J There was J. D. Smith, Gardiner Phillips and Ernest Henner. As soon as Howard Phillips, the son of "Gard" Phillips finished Princeton (University), he came into the office to work.
- Mc Then there were four men? You said that two of the men died?
- J Yeah, ~~xxxxxxx~~ Mr. Smith and Mr. Phillips. And that left Mr. Henner in charge. They had built on quite an addition; the big show room. When the bank closed, it really kind of swallowed them up. That was about 1931.
- Mc This led you to find a different source of employment? Or were you still working there?
- J No. I quit there because they had reduced my wages, giving me credit for what they reduced. I didn't know how that would ever come out in the end. So, I quit and stayed home for the summer. Then in the fall, Mr. (Sidney) Johnston, of Johnston's Linens (Medina, New York) came on the scene.
- Mc How did Mr. Johnston find Marjorie Falconer?
- J He knew Tommy Martin, who worked at the Post Office, very well. He went into the Post Office and asked him if he knew of anybody that he could get to come into the office, who he would recommend. Tom recommended me! Mr. Johnston came down to see if I would take the job. I finally concented that I would. (chuckles).
- Mc Where was Johnston's Linens office located at that time?
- J Johnston's Linens is directly in back of this house (319 Pearl Street) on Bennett Place in Medina. That building was built in 1929.
- Mc Let's go back a little bit here. Will you tell us about your first car?
- J It was a Model T Ford that I had to crank. That was when I worked at the Swett Iron Works.

Mc Do you remember how much you paid for that car?

J I think it was around \$700.00. There were six of us girls that worked in the office and they would pile into my car when we'd go home at night.

Mc Do you remember the horn, or the clutches on the floor?

J I don't remember the horn but I remember the clutches. In cold weather you had to jack up the hind wheels because it would crank easier. That would put the back wheel in motion too. Then you'd get in and put the branke on to slow the wheel. Then you'd be all set.

Mc When you'd start the car, the wheels would start to spin?

J If you had it jacked up, yes. Of course you would put it in neutral so it could.

Mc Let's talk about your remembrances of World War I, or that period of time. What do you remember?

J Well, I remember the night the Armistice was signed, how people got out in the streets and did everything imaginable.

Mc Made a lot of noise?

J ... I remember that night, down by (my home) Wheelman's Rest. There was a bunch of people that got out (of the car) and they found a keg of tar along the road. They put that in the road and set fire to it! Just anything for excitement you know. ...

(During the War) I corresponded with a young man in Minnesota. I had put my name in the sweater that I knitted, like everyone did at the time you know.

Mc Did you knit for the Red Cross?

J Yeah. Then the serviceman would answer when he got the sweater.

Mc Did he go overseas?

J Yes. Afterwards I was out in Minnesota with some cousins. We drove around that way and saw him.

Mc I haven't heard about knitting for the Red Cross before this.

J Oh we knitted soxs and mufflers and sweaters; sleeveless sweaters. It was horrible gray yarn. 'Twasn't very fine at all. Kinda smelled of the mutton, you know. (chuckles).

Mc You were telling about the completion of the Waterport Dam?

- J I remember somebody making the remark that it would take weeks to fill it up with water. They felt that it was such a dip that it would take an awful lot of water. It was 70 feet deep.
- Mc To get back to Johnston's Linens; you said that Mr. Johnston wanted you to come and work for him. Was that to be a permanent job?
- J No. He thought that if I would come and help them through the Christmas rush, which would have been October, November and part of December. But I continued on from that. After that came the inventory and gradually the business kept getting bigger.
- Mc You said that another friend of yours was working there? Mildred Olds?
- J Yes, Mildred had been out there quite awhile. I think she worked out there about 35 years. There was an Edward Cromwell who worked there and took care of the orders and did quite a bit of the packing.
- Mc Your work at Johnston's Linens continued and you and Mr. Johnston became good friends. Finally you decided to marry. When were you married?
- J We were married January 18, 1935. After we were married, we went to Texas. Mr. Johnston wanted to look up a town where his father had lived when he was a boy, for a short period of time, outside of Houston. We were in Texas for six weeks.
- Mc It is nice in Texas at that time of year.
- J Beautiful! We spent some time in San Antonio, Houston and Dallas.
- Mc How did you go (to Texas); did you fly?
- J Drove. Then we came back here.
- Mc Would you tell us a little about this beautiful home? You have said that it has belonged to two families.
- J The house was built by S. G. Rowley. He had the lumber yard and was father to Mrs. Harry Tanner. I've always heard about all the good times they had when the Rowley family was growing up. The house was changed somewhat by Mr. Johnston but most of it remains the same. The floors remain the same, some parquet floors, but are covered now. A lot of the woodwork is cherry.
- Mc The doors are very high, and the ceilings are very high.
- J The doors are unusually high. I don't know just what they are

but he used the best of material in building his own home.
Mr. Johnston must have lived in another house before he bought
this one. I think he came to Medina about 1914.
Mc Your house is almost across the street from the Medina Armory,
and very near the high school.

* * * * *

The preceding interview was conducted August 6, 1979 for the
Orleans County Historical Association, by Helen McAllister of
Medina, N. Y.

This interview was transcribed, edited and typed by
Mrs. McAllister.