Mary (Thayer) Rice

"I was born May 25, 1922 and grew up at 82 Erie Street, Brockport with five siblings—two sisters and two brothers.

"My father and his brother owned Thayer's Restaurant on the west side of Main Street, but it closed during the depression. Then, Dad took a job in a piano factory in East Rochester to make ends meet. As a family we didn't have a car, so he could only come home on weekends by using the trolley. My mother stayed home and took care of us kids.



Fig.1. Mary Rice, at home, 2013.

"Our household was regimented. Each day had its own special task, like laundry or gathering broken limbs for kindling. We sisters would walk to Main Street and run errands for Mom.

"Main Street was where we got everything. There was a meat market, two hat stores,a bus station, and a drug store among other stores. The drug store was where we could purchase bus tickets. I remember when Dobson's Drugstore had a lunch counter and when the trolley car ran right past our house. If you didn't have a car, you went to Rochester on a bus or the trolley. At the trolley station, we'd buy gum from one of the old gum machines.

"When we were kids, we used to go to Petchman's store on the corner of Market and Park Avenue to buy penny candy. The store wasn't very clean, but we didn't care because we could buy a whole bag of candy for a dime. The building is gone now.

"Swartz & Brooks was a dry goods store on Main Street. We used to put our name in for a dress pattern book. Sometimes, we had to wait six months until the books were out of season to get them, but, when we did, we'd cut out the models and made paper dolls of them.

"We never hung around in the house at computers or watching TV. They didn't exist then. The neighborhood on Erie Street was very tight. All the kids would come together and play hopscotch, tag, stone school, and ball games. We rode our bikes in the summer and skated in the winter. Of course, in the winter, we also had snowball fights or built snowmen.

"When my sisters and I were a little older, my mother would give us each fifty cents and we would ride the bus into Rochester and spend the whole day. We'd ride in and back with **Ed Corbitt**, and have lunch-movie time in the five and ten cent stores, all for only fifty cents.

"I always loved school and my friends were very important. Some of the kids were a little clicky at times, but I had plenty



Fig.2. (l-r): Margaret (Thayer) Foster, age 1 1/2, Mary (Thayer) Rice, age 5.



Fig.3. 82 Erie Street residence about 1994 when it was being sold.

Mary (Thayer) Rice

of other friends. After eight years in Nativity, I went to Brockport High School. I waited tables at the old Roxbury Restaurant all through school.

"From high school, I attended Brockport State Teacher's from 1940 to 1944. The college had only one building and a small number of students. Ours was the second class to graduate from there with degrees. All of the students knew each other, and there were dances held for the students. Due to the war going on, there were not many men at the school. College was so different from today because the president at the time, **Dr. Hartwell**, knew every student individually. One time when my mother was sick, my English teacher told me to go home and take care of her.

"I began my teaching career in Williamson, where I taught fourth grade for four years. Then I took a position teaching fourth grade in Canandaigua for three years.

"I met my husband, **Charles**, while I was working in Canandaigua. He had just gotten out of service where he was a pilot and was working at Murphy's Tire Company. We went together for two years before we married in 1951. After we married, we moved to Brockport and started a family—two boys and a girl. He took a job at Kodak in the chemical department. He passed away in 1996. I'll be 92 in May.

"I stayed home with my children for a few years, but we were concerned about Charles losing his job. Kodak was laying people off, so I took a fourth grade teaching position for a year in Bergen, then a first grade position in Hilton.



Fig.6. Mary and Charles Rice, 1991. 40th anniversary.

"Finally, **Father Lintz** talked me into teaching at Nativity. He said that would be better for me, because my children were in the Catholic school, and I'd be closer to them. I taught second grade at Nativity for two years and Remedial Reading for sixteen years before I retired. Nativity was like a second home for me. I was baptized there as a child and all of my children were, too. I still attend Nativity Church, and after retiring from teaching, I became part of the school board.

"Growing up and living in Brockport was very good for me, and Brockport was a great place to raise children. It's a small tight knit community. To me, family is the most important thing. I lived next to my brother until he passed away, and I still visit with my children. Brockport and the neighbors that I had for years operated like a family.

"To me, while going through life, a sense of humor is the



Fig.4 (above). Charles Rice, World War II Air Force radioman..



Fig.5 (right). Charles working at Murphy's Tire Company in Canandaigua.

Mary (Thayer) Rice

next most important thing after family. In my old age, I still am sharp, full of energy, and funny.

"Even though Brockport has changed over the years, it's still is a great place to live."



Fig.7. (l-r): Daughter Kathleen (Rice) Speer, granddaughter Brynn Speer, Mary Rice; granddaughter Kami Speer. About 2010.

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Interviewer: Ian Seppala, student, SUNY College at Brockport Public History Project for the Brockport Community Museum, with facilitator Sue Savard
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Fig.1. By Sue Savard
Fig.3. By Danielle Windus Cook Realty
Fig.6. By Helen E. Simpson, Photographic Artist
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