

[Recreation]

W15070 [?]

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Thomaston,

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Art Botsford: ("Big day of the year was circus day. Along in June P T Barnum would [?] come to Waterbury. We'd all go down on the morning train, and spend the day there. Shops was shut down tight. If they didn't nobody would worked anyway. All the farmers from the surrounding town, they drove down with their teams. You'd see rigs from all over. Some from the back troads you'd swear never got down to the city but that once, all year round. ("There was always a big parade, in the morning; and after that was over the country people would go round gawking in store windows and pass the time that way until it was time for the main show to begin. ("In the fall there was always fairs—and they were looked forward to all the year round. The shops never shut down, but sometimes they might as well have, for all the people they had working. ("Harwinton fair used to get a big crowd. There was never an an admission charge until late years. Them were the two big events of the year—the circus and the fair. There was fairs at Wolcott and Watertown too, that people from here used to go to. ("It was customary, [?] if a fellow had a habit of going every year, and he took his family with him, he'd get a rig from one of the local livery stables. If he liked it, he used to engage that rig for the same time next year, when he brought it back. I knew two-three fellows used to do that. But there were dozens that walked. It wasn't anything to walk ten or [twelve?] miles. Lots of people used to get up early in the morning and walk to Waterbury, if they had tradin' or something to do. ("A great pastime in the fall, of a Sunday, was going nutting. And in the 2 summer time,

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folks used to go berrying. Some would spend their [?] whole summer vacations during the shutdown berrying. You know they used to do a lot of cannin' the women did. [?] Others would hire out to farmers, to pitch hay, or [?] do other work like that. There wasn't many goin' to the seashore, or to the mountains, like there [?] is today. ("Church was the big gathering place of a Sunday night. Folks was a lot steadier church goers than they are now, but of course they wasn't any place else to go—don't know as they was nay more religious. Lots of the young men didn't go to church, that is, they didn't go inside. But they'd always be standing around outside to see their girls home. ("And there was the church [?] festivals—strawberry and ice cream festivals and pancake and maple syrup suppers and baked bean suppers and I don't know what all. ("The girls all wore aprons, and before the big event they'd made neckties to match the aprons. These were passed out to the men, and when you came in you'd have to hunt for the girl whose apron matched [?] your necktie. After supper the cakes that were left over were auctioned off. But the [women?] had a habit of saving the best looking ones for the auction. The girls would egg the young fellows on [?] to [?] buy the cakes, and some of them [?] brought some pretty fancy prices. I see one go for \$15. A lad would keep on bidding to make an impression on some girl. And of course, the money went for a good cause. ("Guess I told you about [?] the fairs, didn't I? The Catholics used to run one that lasted a week. Sold tickets on articles donated by all the merchants, and they had dancing every night, five cents a set. Had 'em over in the basement of the old church. ("Big families was the rule, rather'n the exception. But now some'll give you arguments against big families and some will speak in favor of them. I'll 3 Just give you one side of it, and you can draw your own conclusions. They had a hard time bringing those children up—that's true, on small pay. But once they were grown, they started working in the shops, and they always stuck with their parents. They handed in their wages every week a good many of them, so that in the long run these big families were more prosperous than some of the small ones. They bought their own houses and laid money aside in the bank. ("Of course, here's another thing, property [?] wasn't so high. A man could build himself a pretty good house for \$2,000, includin' the purchase of the lot and everything. They helped each other [?] build, too. [?] It wasn't

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uncommon for a lot of [?] folks to pitch in and build a man's house, if he couldn't afford to get it done no other way. My father, and a lot of other men, each give one feller a [?] day's work on his house, and it probably didn't cost him over three-four hundred dollars, all told. ("Speakin' about a day's work, I never told you about the time Burr Reed sawed a cord of wood in ten hours for a hundred dollar bet. There was a feller came to town one time and opened a little place to make brooms. Him and Burr got to arguin' one day—Burr wasn't a woodcutter, either, he was a butcher, and the upshot of it was they made this bet. Word of it got around town, and along towards the finish there was three-four hundred people gathered around watchin' Burr work. He finished in less'n ten hours, but [?] he was all done in. They had to wrap him in blankets and carry him home. But that night, [?] darned if he wasn't up to a dance with his girl. ("I was talkin' about fluid, for lamps yesterday. They had street lamps there, on all the principal streets, had to be filled every day. They burned [naptha?] in 'em. They got so's they knew just how much it took to burn till 12 o'clock at night, and that's how much they put in 'em. No more. 4 "They took those lamp posts down after the other lights were put in, and sent to Northfield and Reynolds Bridge. The old lights were burned up till eighty-seven. Charley Mason was the first man to trim and light the lamps and after that there was a man named Tom Butler. ("I been looking through some more of these old books," Mr.[/?] Botsford [takes?] one from a table near his Morris chair. "Here's some more prices: dozen of [?] oranges, twenty five cents; four lemons, eight cents; five bars of soap, fifty cents; four [?] pounds and a quarter of codfish, twenty three cents. [?] Here's a bill for one month for \$37.20, and for another month it was only \$7.60—quite a difference. Two yards of silk, \$4; and a yard and a half of cambric, 30 cents. This runs from April 2, [1858?] to April 28, '63. (Here's something else might interest you, too," Mr. Botsford has a newspaper clipping from the Waterbury Republican of Dec. 1, [1931?] —an item from the Thomaston correspondent describing the anniversary of the local fire department. Among other events, in the [?] departmental [?] annals the article describes the "greatest day in Thomaston's history." ("An excerpt follows: ("Both companies were joint hosts for the great fireman's day in Thomaston Sept 11, 1902, the high point of which was the monster parade, with more than 1750 men in the line of march, comprising 28 fire

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companies, 14 bands, numerous drum corps and a great display of fire fighting equipment. This was unquestionably the greatest day in Thomaston's history. It was reported that there were upwards of 10,000 visitors in Thomaston on that day. As Thomaston had less than 4,000 inhabitants at that time that was a notable temporary increase." (Further on is this paragraph: "When they (the two local companies) took up their quarters in the present building rivalry was so keen that hard feelings 5 ran amuck, every member was given a key to his own department, and not allowed in the other."