

Q. For the past few years now, BYU students have been attending school in Nauvoo. Have you ever been in any contact with some of the students here?

A. No, though I have spoken to a few.

Q. What are your feelings about the BYU students being here?

A. No problem at all. I think there's an awful lot to be said about Brigham Young University, and if it turns into a junior college someday, I say more power to them.

A. [MK] The other day I walked into the drugstore, and there must have been ten young students there who didn't make way, and I had to ask permission to get by because they were blocking the doorway. The next time you see them, they're stepping off the sidewalk and being very polite, but you have that everywhere in every situation. Some people are oblivious to what is going on, and others are polite and nice.

A. I think when the Church puts on big events, like *The City of Joseph*, they could have better control. It's a great production.

Q. Do you find Mormons taking an active role in the community?

A. Yes. They are more so, I think.

Q. Are there any other comments, anything else you would like to say?

A. No. I don't know of anything else that needs to be said. If I have any problems, then I can just blame them on Amy. [laughs]

John LaCroix

Bunside, Illinois

Birthday unknown (1925?)

Interview on October 4, 2001, in his home by Jeff Johnson

Patricia LaCroix and Jedediah Briggs also present

Q. [Jeff Johnson] How long have you lived in the Nauvoo area?

A. [John LaCroix] All of my life. I am seventy-six years old.

Q. Where were you born?

A. In a house which stood twenty feet east from the garage. I was born and raised in that house.

Q. When did your ancestors first come to this area?

A. I can't tell you just exactly when they came here. They came early from England. My mother's family came from England. As for my father, his family is from Germany.

Q. Why did they leave England?

A. For freedom from the conditions in Europe and England.

Q. What occupations have you engaged in here at Nauvoo?

A. I have been a farmer all of my life. I worked for four years at the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Q. How did that go?

A. I traveled a lot and saw much of Illinois. I checked farm warehouses and grain dealerships.

Q. What do you particularly like about living in this area?

A. I have never lived in any other place else, except the two years I spent in the navy. I would rather live here

than those two years spent in the navy.

Q. Have you done any traveling?

A. Yes. I have gone halfway around the world. I have not been any farther east than Massachusetts, I was in the navy visiting places such as the Yellow Sea and Japan. During World War II, I was in Japan and saw the effects of the atomic bomb. I saw the devastation through binoculars at Tokyo Bay. I was tickled to death to see the Japanese brought down to their knees.

Q. What are some of the challenges for residents living here?

A. [Patricia LaCroix] Most people believe that farmers are rich.

A. She was a city girl, and I was a farm boy. She thought I was rich, [chuckles]

Q. What are some events or cultural characteristics that make Nauvoo an attractive place to live?

A. It is a friendly town. I went to the high school and a country grade school in Nauvoo. I got out of high school, and World War II was just starting. So I decided to join the navy. I spent two years in the navy and was on a destroyer for one year.

Q. How did that go?

A. It was a very educational experience.

Q. Have you ever served on any civic positions?

A. I was on the voting precinct committee. I helped get the voting precinct out. I would help on election day. One year, we got ninety percent of the precinct out to the polls. I was also on the board of review for Hancock County. People would get their assessments, and I would go around and answer any complaints people had—did that for a couple of years.

Q. What groups of people stand out in your mind as having an influential part of the history of Nauvoo?

A. There was no particular one group. They all have done their part. Nauvoo has had a great community. They worked together—the religions have worked together.

Q. The Mormons came to Nauvoo in 1839 under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Over the next few years the city grew to nearly 15,000 inhabitants. Conflicts and contention arose between the Mormons and the other citizens of this area. This led to the Mormon departure in 1846. What is your understanding of the conflicts between Mormons and non-Mormons?

A. From what I have heard through my ancestors is that they were crooks. Other groups of people would raid the countryside and steal horses and cattle. Then they would go to Nauvoo to hide. The Mormons then were blamed, and as a result the residents pushed them out of Nauvoo.

Q. Were any of your ancestors members of the Church?

A. Yes. I can't remember who they were.

Q. Do you know if any of them left the area?

A. No. They remained here.

Q. The *Warsaw Signal* was a newspaper published by people opposed to the Mormons. Are you aware of this publication or any others?

A. No.

Q. What can you tell me about the Icarians?

A. I can't tell you much. I have read about it. but I'm getting old and can't remember, [laughs] There is a museum on the other side of town. I helped at the museum as a host or guide. I did it for service and did not receive any pay.

Q. I have never been there, but I have heard of it. Tell me about the beginnings of the wine industry.

A. I used to own a farm that had an old wine cellar—probably used by the Icarians. There was a lot of wine produced in Nauvoo—there still is.

Q. What caused the wine industry to decline?

A. The vineyard acreage was cut drastically.

Q. Why?

A. Because it was so labor intensive. You had to prune the vines in January in the freezing cold. If you did not do this, they died.

Q. Are you familiar with the bleu cheese industry in Nauvoo?

A. Yes. I was a dairy fanner one time, though I never sold milk for cheese. They would go around the area and sign up farmers to buy milk from them.

Q. How long has the cheese industry been in Nauvoo?

A. My whole life.

Q. What churches in the area have been influential in the Nauvoo area?

A. The Lutheran Church has been around, and so has the Catholic Church.

A. [PL] One of John's ancestors helped start the Methodist Church in Nauvoo.

A. [JL] My Grandfather LaCroix is buried in the Nauvoo Cemetery. An obelisk from England designates the

spot where my great-greatgrandfather Henry Thornber is buried.

Q. Are you of the Methodist faith?

A. Presbyterian.

Q. Have you heard about anyone's thoughts or feelings about the Mormons and what they have done to the Nauvoo area, perhaps in the restoration of the old homes and businesses?

A. No, I haven't. I just don't pay attention to what people say. I just know that the Mormons have brought Nauvoo back to life. For a while, Nauvoo was pretty dormant.

A. [PL] I have not been down in the city for a while. Don't they have three or four houses being constructed down there?

Q. Do you two see the construction as good or bad?

A. Well, I don't like all of the busyness. Sometimes it is hard to get to places without bumping into the workers and their machinery.

Q. How did you feel when the announcement of the rebuilding of the Nauvoo Temple was made?

A. [JL] It did not make a bit of difference to me.

Q. Why is that?

A. I can care less what the Mormons have done.

Q. Have you heard what other people have said about it?

A. Most folk feel like I do.

Q. How do you think the construction of the temple will affect Nauvoo?

A. It is going to increase the traffic—people will come into the area to see the temple.

Q. What do you think the city can do to ease the traffic?

A. Build better roads. It has just brought a lot of congestion into Nauvoo. In some ways it is good and in others it is bad. Nauvoo is quiet and trouble-free. A very nice restaurant and good hotel is in Nauvoo.

Q. What do you see in the future for Nauvoo?

A. I think it will grow a little.

Q. What would you like to see happen in Nauvoo?

A. Progress is a good thing—if they can keep up with the cars.

Q. Do you have any plans to visit the temple when it is completed?

A. I probably will. I have been supportive of all the other churches. I have always tried to help them when they needed things.

Q. Are you familiar with any of the doctrines of the Mormons?

A. No.

Q. Can you tell me what some of the buildings were like many years ago?

A. People used the stone from the original temple to build other buildings. I think the Catholics did that. There has been a lot of excavating in and around the temple site. There used to be many more wine vineyards.

Q. What happened to the wine industry?

A. [PL] I guess it just petered out.

A. [JL] The Baxter family still does a lot of grape production.

A. [PL] The farmers would take all of the grapes and try to sell them.

A. [JL] Grapes were sold in big four-quart baskets. You could put twenty-four-hundred baskets in a farm truck, stock the truck, and put a tarp over the grapes. The farmers would go as far as Fargo, North Dakota—maybe even farther. Also, strawberries were grown and sold here.

A. [PL] A lot of fruit was grown such as strawberries, rhubarb, and grapes. We had persimmon trees around there. You can't eat persimmon fruit until there is a frost. It is very sour before the frost.

A. [JL] One guy asked me what persimmon trees were. I told him they were prunes. So he tried one, and, boy, he just puckered up. [chuckles]

Q. So, overall, with the building of the temple and the renovation of Nauvoo, do you feel it will help stimulate the economy?

A. It won't hurt it.

Q. It will help the community?

A. Yes.

Q. In Nauvoo there is a semester for college students to attend. The Mormons are the proprietors of this semester. Have you met any of the students?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you ever come in contact with the nuns at the monastery?

A. I was inflicted with appendicitis one time, and the sisters from St. Joseph's Hospital in Keokuk, Iowa, administered to me and gave me a shot of glucose. Three other individuals were inflicted with appendicitis, and I was the only one who survived. I have always been close to them.

A. [PL] I tell you, God still makes miracles.

A. [JL] I will always hold a soft spot in my heart for the sisters. I have always tried to help them.

A. [PL] All of the churches come together every spring for the Easter performance and have a choir. Everybody gets together. There used to be activities in the gymnasium. Everybody would help.

A. [JL] I was on a ship one time with people of different religions. They were arguing and yelling. I just about wanted to throw them overboard.

Q. Because you are a veteran of World War II, what has been your reaction to the recent terrorist attacks?

A. I say we should whip the hell out of them.

Q. Do you think it has brought the country closer together?

A. Yes. Everybody at Pearl Harbor came together, and I think it will help America.

[Information shared by John LaCroix and his wife off the record]

Many years ago hundreds of wolves roamed the area.

Before the dam in Keokuk was built, the Mississippi River was lower, which exposed a series of small islands. On these islands grew good and delicious wild mushrooms.

A well dug by the LaCroix family gives so much water that John LaCroix believes it to be connected to an underground lake.

Mary Eleanor Logan

Nauvoo, Illinois

Birthday: February 25, 1924

Interview on November 22, 2001, in her home by Jayson Edwards

Jordan Whiting also present

Q. [Jayson Edwards] This sure is a nice place.

A. [Mary Logan] Yes. I like it very much here.

Q. How long have you lived here?

A. About four or five years. I used to live in a house back there, [points north] I decided that I was getting past the age of wanting to mow lawns. I figured since my grandchildren would be gone in a few years—and they are moved away now—I would sell that place and move down here.

Q. Did you live on a farm, or was it a small lot?

A. It was a small house with a big yard.

Q. How long have you lived in the Nauvoo area?

A. All my life. I would say that because, except for four years that were spent in Minnesota at college and three years at Macomb teaching school, I have lived in Nauvoo.

Q. What did you teach in school?