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## Robert J. Mott interview for a Wright State University History Course

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Robert J. Mott

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Bob Mott

C.S. Where did you go to high school?

B.M. Groten Central School, Groten New York.

C.S. What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?

B.M. Gosh, I don't know, probably much like this neighborhood where you left your doors open and people walked in and helped themselves to whatever they needed. If they were short on something they would just come in and go to the refrigerator and get something and then they might bring it back, you know, ah, very close-knit neighborhood. The whole town, a very small town, but everybody knows everybody throughout the town so you never feared for anything. It was just an open door policy. I don't know what else to say about it, it was just a very close-knit community and practically everybody was related too.

C.S. What year did you graduate from high school?

B.M. 1958.

C.S. What did you do for fun back then?

B.M. Well, we had a local swimming pool, which was basically nothing but a pond with three cement walls and fed by a spring. Ahh, I think our big excitement was going sitting on the corner and watching the cars go by and if we saw an out of town car, because in New York you could tell by the license plate where they were from because they used the county as the first two characters of the license plate so you'd know if they were TP is was Tompkins county, CT it was Courtland County, you know, and if you saw an out of state car that was really... then basically we hung around town and we had a soda spot that we went to where we could sit and get the lemon cokes, cherry cokes, phosphates, uh, had a juke box. Of course, we could dance in there and that's where, we had two of them, one was for an older group and one was for a younger group and uh, that's about where we went everyday after school.

C.S. What sort of things did you do on dates?

B.M. Drive-in movies, uh, go to the soda bars, the soda spas, uh, maybe once in awhile one of the kids would have a party, well chaperoned (ha, ha) and gee, of course, you know when we got to be juniors or seniors somebody would have a car and drive to another town, go to parties in other towns. Nothing real exciting. School dances were the big thing. Basketball games, football, basketball. Uh, there was always a dance of Friday night. Everybody went to the dance. It was not an exciting place. It doesn't seem that way now, but back then it was real exciting, so, that's about all we did. We didn't have a fun filled life.

C.S. Did you go to the movies, were there theaters in your area?

B.M. There was one theater house, an old opera house in town that we would go to. Younger kids would go on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for only a

dime, it eventually got up to a quarter, but every Friday night, I remember my mom used to give my next oldest sister; her and I would go to a movie, every Friday night. That was a ritual. But once we got older, in our teens, especially juniors and seniors in high school, somebody had a car, we go to the next town because they had a bigger theater and they got better run movies. And eventually, I think even when I was a teenager, our theater in town was closed up. So we were at the mercy of television, was the thing. I remember the first people in town to get a TV, uh, was probably the poorest family in town, but they got the TV. It was a small round screen; they had the big magnifying glass in front of it so you could see. I remember the first show I ever saw on television. It was called Lights Out, interesting show. The kids invited a bunch of the other kids from town out to watch. That was a big thrill. I know another thing we used to do as kids, probably up until we were fifteen or sixteen. We traded comic books. Now that was a Saturday night deal where you went from house to house and took your comic books and you traded off, maybe two for one or maybe I'll give you one Superman for three Betty and Veronicas or something like that. And that was a big Saturday night deal. You can tell we led an exciting life.

C.S. Who were some of your favorite actors or actresses?

B.M. Susan Hayward, without a doubt. Judy Holiday, no doubt, one of my very favorites. Of course, Ann Southern, and now they're running the Mazy series, which I love. I love the old movies more so than I do the current films. There aren't that many current films that I care about. One of my favorite movies of all time was Dinner at Eight with Marie Dressler, Jean Harlow, going back, it was before my time, but I loved that movie. Like I said, Susan Hayward was without a doubt my favorite actress. Actor, gosh I don't know, I really didn't have a favorite actor, I guess they were all good. Tyrone Powers, Clark Gable, probably a lot nobody's ever heard of.

C.S. Where did you like to shop?

B.M. My favorite thing was I used to love to go to the record stores and buy 45's when a new one came out. I'd save my allowance; I might get one record a week. That was the only place I really liked to shop, was the record store. Of course then they didn't have... music stores were my favorite. Clothing stores didn't matter to me. I'm not a designer clothes wearer, I guess you call it, and the only thing; I guess we always went to the grocery store, once every two weeks. It was a big deal to go to the next town and go to the grocery store. We only had a small market in town. That was a big to do. The other big to do was once a month we got a ride to the next town, took the Greyhound bus and went to Syracuse and spent the whole day up there shopping at various stores and going out to eat. That was once a month. In fact that was a real big deal. If you got to Syracuse it seemed like it was a hundred miles away, actually it was like twenty-eight miles, but it was a big to do. But as far as shopping I was never a great one for shopping except grocery stores because I love to cook.

C.S. What fashions were popular then?

B. M. If I remember the girls were wearing the poodle skirts and the slips, the crinolines, and of course the saddle shoes were big, white bucks for the guys. Uh, I remember the song, Marty Robbins, A White Sport coat and a Pink Carnation. Well, that was our junior senior prom. We all wore white sport coats and pink carnations. There was this material, the guys always wore their T-shirts, and their shirts, and their short sleeve shirts rolled up and they kept their cigarette pack in their sleeves, uh, Levi's were just about coming in then. Chino pants, you know with the buckle in the back, if you remember those and the button down collar. Of course the dress shirts had the tab collar. And there was a one material, and I can't remember what, but shirts were, I don't even know what you'd call the material. They weren't a silk, oh boy, I don't even know if I can describe it; I know they were kind of a see through. Gee, I'm not much on materials, so I can't really tell you what it was. But the biggest thing was the Chino pants with the buckle in the back. The button down shirts with the tab shorts for dress shirts were big, T-shirts were everyday thing. Ah, and the wild Hawaiian shirts were big then too. The wilder you could get, the better it was. Penny loafers. About everybody wore white socks. Once in a while you'd find a pair or argyles somebody would wear, but usually everybody wore white socks with penny loafers. Of course the pants were like above the ankle you know. Called flood pants now, but that was it, so your white socks showed real good.

C.S. What kind of music did you listen to?

B.M. Oh, it was all rock and roll, I mean, you know, Bo Diddly, Fats Domino, of course, Elvis, uh, Buddy Holly, Bobby V, Bobby Riddell, you know you go back there. The Chiffons, a lot of Motown groups, you know. The penguins, I'm trying to think of some of the old grooves, but also I was brought up with my brothers and sister listening to a lot of the 40's music, the big band was some of my favorites. Loved the Big Band, it was a big thrill for us to go see the Glenn Miller's band, you know Glenn wasn't there but we would take a car load of kids. We'd drive to Syracuse when Glenn Miller's band was going to be there. We'd go, we'd have a great time, jitterbugging, and that's basically about it. Probably the Big Band music was the biggest influence.

C.S. I think you've answered this already, what kind of things did you do for entertainment at home? How about radio?

B.M. Oh radio, yeah, because up until 1952 we didn't have television. We had radio, so we always listened to radio. There was always shows, Inner Sanctum, Gangbusters, Molly Goldberg, Ozzie and Harriet, Fibber McGee and Molly, Burns and Allen, and then every Sunday at five o'clock, I'll never forget this, my mom had dinner ready. We sat down at five o'clock; she had the radio on to a program called The Greatest Story Ever Told. You did not talk, you simply ate. If you needed something you asked for it, but that was it. But the radio show was on when we had Sunday dinner. Called The Greatest Story Ever Told and that was, I think, Cardinal Sheen had that program. That was interesting. That was one thing she insisted on. Sunday afternoon, five o'clock.

C. S. What kind of games did you have? Did you have board games?

B. M. Oh yeah, we had board games. We had, of course, Monopoly, which I still have my original Monopoly set, and uh, there was Sorry, but we played a lot of cards. A game there, that most people don't know about here, is called Pitch or High Low Jacket, I guess. We'd play that a lot, Pinochle was a big game; we played a lot of cards. The family played card together, all the kids, we played cards together. That's about all; we weren't big board game people. We had a few, but cards were the big thing, we enjoyed playing cards.

C.S. What kind of things did you do on summer breaks or vacations?

B. M. Oh boy, mainly, I can remember we had what we called the hill up behind some of our houses where wild black berries grew and several of us kids would go up there and pick blackberries early in the morning and then at lunch time we stand on the corner downtown and sell the blackberries for like twenty-five cents a quart. And made a lot of money. Then our job was at the end of the season we had to go up and burn the black berry patch. We were very careful and all the parents knew it. We went up there. We burned it, we contained it and turned out we never had to have the fire department. Today it is not that way. Oh, lets see, we also we took a lot of hikes up through the woods, maybe camp out and uh, we would go up to a place we'd call Beaver Falls and that was just a creek running up through the hills and over some falls. We'd camp out and stay overnight and come back the next day. We had games at night we played, course this is when I was younger. When I got older it was just hanging around at the soda spa was the big entertainment for the summer for those who didn't go anyplace. Not many in town went on vacations. We had one factory in town, Smith-Corona typewriters, in fact every Smith-Corona typewriter used to be built there up until a few years ago when they moved out. They would go on vacation the first two weeks in August, so that was a dull period, two weeks in August when the kids had to be with their families. We would go on picnics a lot, a lot of picnics in the summer. And later years, just hanging around, maybe playing some softball, going swimming, like I said, the soda spa. That was the high light. Not a lot to do in that town growing up. It was rather an impoverished town, I should say that. Even though there was a factory there... everyone in town eventually worked at Smith-Corona typewriters. So it was the mainstay of the community. It's what kept everybody going. Not a lot of excitement. In the summer time I remember they had in the factory what they called a candy wagon. Basically it was a concession booth on wheels and my brother ran that for a gentleman and they would go from floor to floor, push this cart around and sell everything. And in the summertime several of us would go into the factory after closing and pick up pop bottles because people would just leave their pop bottles around and we would get, like, a penny a bottle and take them back to my brother who ran the concession and he paid us. So yeah, that took a couple of hours. It was just something different to do but it gave us a little spending money. Then a lot of times junior and senior year many of us worked in the farmers' fields. We called "haying it". But they baled the hay and we've have to take it to the barns and all this and we were early morning to late at night. We'd

do any odd jobs like that we could. Sometimes, that could take a long, maybe, three or four weeks of your summer you were busy working. You didn't have a chance to, as I said in an impoverished neighborhood, then what we made went to our parents. We got a little bit of the money, but most of it went back to help our parents out. Which we didn't mind because we had a good time doing it, it was a lot of hard work, but we had a good time. Don't regret one minute of it.

C.S. Who were your role models?

B.M. Oh gosh, I would probably have to say my oldest brother. I always had a lot of respect for him. He was, thought he was going to be the black sheep of the family. He wasn't. He turned out very well. He was just one of these, he was truly an outdoor guy. He liked everything and I admired everything he did. He was a drinker and but he was the most trusting person. He was the one who ran the concession stand for this guy and he would leave on Friday night with all this money in his pocket, go to the bar and he would drink, but he would never spend a cent of that money. The guy trusted him explicitly and that always impressed me that he could go out, get totally drunk, but never touch all that money he was carrying. But everything he did, was just, uh... he got drunk one night and ended up in Alaska. He and three or four of his buddies took off and drove to Alaska. You know how neat, the guy has a mind of his own, and he did it. But he was good with flowers; he had the most beautiful roses. He could hunt, he could fish, he could do anything. I just always respected him. He was a giver, not a taker, always gave. My mother never really lacked for anything because he made sure she had things she really needed, not what she wanted, but what she needed. That was good. I'd have to say that was my role model.