

**STUDENT MILL WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

Armand Camire
(Interviewer: Schuyler Haynes)

SMWOH #008
March 5, 2005

Schuyler Haynes: . . . for the Mill Workers Oral History Project on March 5th, in Lewiston, Maine. I'm Schuyler Haynes interviewing. And could you please state your full name and spell it?

Armand Camire: My name is Armand Camire, A-R-M-A-N-D, C-A-M-I-R-E.

SH: Thank you. And what is your place of birth, and the date?

AC: May 22nd, 1930.

SH: Place of birth?

AC: It's, I was in Suncook, but they changed that to Pembroke, in New Hampshire. That's in between Manchester and Concord.

SH: And where did you grow up?

AC: I grew up, we moved from New Hampshire, I was talking to my sister yesterday, we moved from New Hampshire I think 1932, and I was right here in Lewiston-Auburn for a good part of my young life up til, well, til I was almost sixty, and then I moved to Turner.

SH: Turner, Maine?

AC: Yes, Turner, Maine, yeah.

SH: And what was the community like in Lewiston at that time?

AC: At what time?

SH: When you moved here, I guess.

AC: Well, I remember way back, the only thing I remember about Lewiston-Auburn is 1936, the flood they had in 1936. It happened that we were living on Park Street, and I was going over the bridge to Auburn and there was six inches of water over that bridge. And that's the only, that's the first time I remember this, that we were living on Park Street. And those days, it was more crowded, you might, there was more buildings. And my sister was telling me when they first moved here in 1932, my father was a weaver in New Hampshire.

SH: In what mills, in the -?

AC: I got everything in there, but I don't remember what mill.

SH: But he was a mill worker as well?

AC: He was a mill worker. And when they got laid off over there, Bates was asking for weavers so he moved the whole family down here. And I think at that time I had six or seven brothers, and four of those born here in Maine.

SH: You had six or seven brothers?

AC: I had eleven brothers and sisters all together.

SH: Oh, my goodness. And where are you in line?

AC: I'm the middle one.

SH: Right in the middle? I'm the middle child as well, of five, not eleven. So did your dad get you the job at the mill, or did (*unintelligible phrase*)?

AC: Well, the thing is, when they first come here from New Hampshire the Bates Mill on Canal Street, they had the houses for the workers. So when they first got here, they had a house right there. It was the company's house, all these buildings there on Canal Street. And I remember when I was six years old, about that, we had the, on Main Street and Lisbon Street we had the trolley cars, they were going up and down.

And Lisbon Street and Main Street was pretty well crowded together with buildings, these older buildings, there was, on Main Street going down there was the Littleton Hotel, where Central Maine Power thing's over there, and there was all buildings on this side of the street. And Lisbon Street, there was all kinds of businesses. Like Pecks has been there for a long time, and there was J.C. Penney's, and there was Sears catalogue department on Main Street. And then as you went down Lisbon Street, there was all kinds of stores.

And that's when I was growing up, but when we moved to Park Street, after we moved out of, I would call it a project, the company houses.

SH: So was it, it was like a boarding house?

AC: It was a small apartment houses, until we could find an apartment. And Pine Street's just a couple streets up, and that's when we, we moved there. I remember that

quite a lot because there was a shoe store, the Jalbert brothers had a shoe store right there, and there was a, where the Salvation Army was there was a, and the city building, the police off-, there was all kinds of business there. And that bank, the First National Bank right there on the corner. The Post Office was there, and on I think it's Ash Street, going back up, there was a little grocery store and a doughnut shop and all that stuff going through there.

SH: What are your parents' names?

AC: My father's Napoleon Camire, and -

(Shows written names.)

SH: Okay, and your mother's name? What is your mother's name? So we can get this on the recorder.

AC: Okay, my mother is Virginia Rondeau, her maiden name was Rondeau, see. And these kids, all the grandchildren made this, Anniversary 2001, and they got all our history and all that stuff. So, my mother's name is Virginia Rondeau.

SH: So what is your family's ethnic background, could you talk about that a little bit?

AC: Well, my father come from Canada, and my mother, she was New Hampshire. And when my father, they met, my father and mother met in the mill up there. She was working in the mill, and he was working in the mill, and that's how they got married.

SH: Did they both speak French?

AC: Yeah, in those days it was mostly all French, yeah.

SH: Did you grow up speaking French in your house?

AC: Yeah, we did. Because when I was living in Lewiston, and I was going to St. Peter's church, all French. And when we moved, I was seven years old when we moved from Lewiston to Auburn, where my brother lives now, and it was all French. And when I went to the English school, I was put back to the first grade so I lost two years, the transfer over. So that was mostly all French, and my mother was always French. In fact, a lot of times we talk to her in English, she would answer us in French. So that's a, and my father's side there, he come from, well he was of New Hampshire and a lot of his brothers and sisters, they all got French names.

SH: What were your parents' occupations? Your father was a weaver.

AC: My father was a weaver, and my mother, after they got married, with all these kids, she stayed home mostly all the time, yeah.

SH: Oh, well yeah, eleven children (*unintelligible word*). When did you begin working at the mill?

AC: In 1948, my father had a problem and I went to work during the summer, I think I was seventeen years old, at the Bates Mill as a cleaner and a greaser.

SH: What is a greaser?

AC: A greaser, in those days they had machinery, the weaving machines. There was, you know, when you lubricate a vehicle today, you have a grease gun, and the old days, the old machine, they had open port oil, you had to oil them with an oil can, yeah, yeah, see, and there was an opening. It's not like the new machinery today's all

together, but. And I was a cleaner, and we cleaned the cotton rooms with air hose, we had a big air hose and we'd push all the dust off, the cotton, the spare cotton and all that, and we'd clean them all up, we swept the floors, swept the ceilings because there was so much dust, and, that's how I got started at the Bates. That was about 1948.

SH: And you were seventeen?

AC: I was seventeen years old, yeah.

SH: Did you do it with your siblings, or your brothers?

AC: Yeah, because my brother Lucien, my oldest one, he was, when he come out of the second World War, I think before he went in the service, he was working as a, in the weave room also. I don't think his trade was a weaver, but when he came out the service he came back in the Bates Mill. Because in those days, there was the mills, there was the shoe shop, and there was lumber yards, little independent lumber yards, that you could find, as a laborer.

As you got to be a more, what would you call, professional, a weaver is a good skill trade, and a fixer is like a mechanic, are good trades, because you have to work yourself up. And we did have manuals to tell us how these machines, you got some of these machines that's a hundred, well, a hundred inch long, the cloth was a hundred inch long, and there's two feet on each side of that for the shuttle. These shuttles would start over here with a bobbin in there, this would carry the thread to the other side. And the machine was a pretty good machine.

And one thing about the Bates Mill, when they put down a machine on the floor, they would line right up, just straight with a line and all that. And I was working in the number one and two weave, which they call that a plain weave, sheets, pillowcases, you know, there was just, you had about two to six harnesses that would control the

thread going in, and there was a reed that was keeping it straight, and the harnesses would lift them up while this shuttle goes through, one end to the other end, and the shuttles go up, the harness would go up and down, the shuttles go back and forth. And in those days there were, they call a pick ball, that was on the cam, and it would hit that, and this was; we had a lug strap coming out there, and they would, then over here we had a, like a bouncing rubber thing, or leather, and this would take this, and this would shoot all the way across. And then the harness would turn and would be a weave.

And you had some of these looms, the Bates were very good in chemicals, there were all kinds of cotton. You had the one-sixteenth, one and one-eighth, and you had the bill. And then in my department, as you went down to number five, is what they call the jacquard weave, it makes designs, like tablecloths designs and all that, which is more, you had as much as four shuttles that made the -. And then they would have what you call a card upstairs that would control the design. On every, on every loom you had what they call a heddle, and the heddle was tied up to a string, and the string would go up through the, what I think they called a computer, cards, you had little punch holes and these little pins, you know, if there was no hole there it would keep the thread up. And if there's a hole there, when it turns, it was like a cylinder that would turn, every time that turned it would change the designs of the thing.

Jacquard weave is like a, and they made their, what the Bates is famous for is the Martha Washington, the George Washington, which they call terries, and that's, the main body of the blanket is a sheet like, and then the designs for the little, what would you call, knobs that would come up, this was controlled by the card that would make the design of the head and all that. And then they had what they call the Queens. The Queens was the name of the blanket, it was all kinds of designs on it, and it was, the terries and the Queens, it was what they call a two-warp.

A warp is the big spool (*unintelligible word*), and on the terries there was

probably five hundred or some odd thread coming down through these harnesses and these cards, and they would, and then the filling, these different kind, if you need, if you would like to have a tight knit you would have probably a hundred and ten picks. That means this has to go a hundred and ten times across to make one inch of cloth. See, it all depends on the quality of the cloth you want.

When we moved to Auburn I was working at the Bates Mill. Now, we had the Cailler family which, I used to have a car, and they used to work second shift, Mrs. Cailler and her daughter, I don't, forgot her name now, they used to travel with me at night, we were working second shift. I'd pick them up at three o'clock and bring them back home at twelve.

SH: You worked three p.m. until twelve?

AC: Yeah, see, in those days we used to have half an hour break. They changed that to eight hours straight after a while. But you still had your breaks, you had ten minutes on the hour, you know, to take a, whatever break you want to be, you know.

SH: So you began as a cleaner, and then you moved your way up to a weaver?

AC: Yeah, because the old weavers, they wanted to retire, there's some, a lot of them, they wanted to retire. Especially in number two weave, number one and two weave, they been there forever. And they were getting to the age, you know, in those days they had no pension plan, no nothing, this and that, until the union got in there.

SH: It was, the union, was that before you worked there?

AC: It was, well, I'll let you read that later on, about that. Anyway, so it's, there was no union when my, well, my father was very strong in the union.

SH: Was he?

AC: Yeah, and so, there's an article in this book right here all about the Bates, a good part, that when the Bates went on strike for four weeks, and we had a pay cut. And then we went back in, and because, and just in there. I was there before the union was there.

And there wasn't, they didn't have too many safety things. Because in the weave room you got the *click-clack-click-click-clack-clack*, and the motor's running, the shuttle's going back and forth, the pin ball hitting, I mean, you couldn't hear. I mean, if you couldn't read lips, you couldn't hear nobody. And it didn't start til after 1950 that they gave you earplugs.

And when I first started at the Bates Mill, I guess you had to have a physical to go in, and if you wasn't, you know, if your blood pressure was too high they wouldn't hire you. And if you had any medical things they wouldn't hire you. So a lot of these people, that would come in, you know, that did have problems, well, how come they hired you and they didn't hire me? You know, because there wasn't (*unintelligible word*). And they got stricter and stricter with that, because the insurance problem. That's when the insur-, they started paying us a little insurance, you know.

SH: I saw in the, when we went on the trip, they had the spool, the leather spools to keep the mill moving? Was that, that was before? I guess you never saw any of those?

AC: Yeah, when I st-, I worked, I've also, when I got laid off I went to work in Manchester, Connecticut, and they had some of these old looms with the belt, belt driven, and they was very small looms, they was narrow looms. One thing that Bates is famous for is their wide, the bedspreads. And right after the second World War, they decided to buy some new machinery, so we used to have the old looms going very

slow, you know. I mean, you could see the shuttle go back and forth, the harness. After the second World War, they bought the high speed looms, Draper looms, and Cks and all that, it was just a little more modern type of machinery.

SH: Interesting. Did you, there were different ethnic groups when you were working in the mills, like the Franco-Americans and then other ethnic groups. Were there any conflicts between different groups?

AC: Well, when the, when there was a shortage of mill workers, when GE come in and a few others, and especially after the Korean War, or before the Korean War, a lot of people went to Hartford, Connecticut, because they were paid more money, this and that. And we had a problem with workers, they couldn't get enough workers. And I was one of the weavers, and they asked me if they wouldn't mind me teaching somebody how to weave. And they imported all the Mexicans, and a lot of the workers didn't want to teach them because they were afraid they were going to take their jobs away from them.

SH: Really?

AC: Yeah, but there was so much work. We had a family, I called him Rudolph, and his wife, he came up here, and his wife, Rudolph worked in the weave room, his wife worked I think in the spinning room. And I taught Rudolph how to weave, and he was there for quite a number of years. But a lot of people didn't want to teach, but there was so many French people in there, because that's all they used to do, talk French. And there was some of these older ladies, I got one lady that she, before she got married, she was working in the mill as a weaver, and then all of a sudden when she started having her children she got out of it. So for ten years she was a homemaker, and then when she come back again, she just took her job weaving. She was total French, yeah, real French, yeah.

SH: So how, you got your job from your father, right? Or did you -?

AC: Well, it's, my father was in there but, it did help, yeah.

SH: And were there ways of getting favorite jobs, did people, was the, you said that the best jobs to have were weaving and a mechanic. But were there people that, I mean, were there ways to get those jobs other than just -?

AC: Well, you had to work up to them. Unless you come in as, you were qualified as a weaver. Because when I started weaving, I was cleaning, and then at night, if you got done a little earlier, you would go to an old weaver and say, you want to teach me how to weave. And they taught us how to tie the knots, how to patch, make the hooks and this and that, and then, you know, how to run the machines. And in the old days, the old machines, they were a slow machine, and there's a break on these machine, but as they get older the brakes let go. So you would bypass, it was supposed to stop right where, you know, stop, and you had to find out what caused that loom to stop. Was it a warp break, was it a filament break, was it a mechanical problem? And a lot of people that, you know, you had to work your way up.

So they needed weavers for, well, they needed weavers because they could see a lot of these people were going to retire. And so they took me off cleaning and they put me on the pick out hand. A pick out hand is somebody that helps other weavers, and they used to put us on the, probably three or four weavers, and these would tell us what to do, what we're doing wrong and this and that. And then after they thought you were qualified, they would let, give you, start with one or two looms, and three or four looms, see if you could do the work, plus the quality of the loom.

SH: Were there different jobs that females typical took versus men? Were there jobs that -?

AC: Well, in the weave room they would like to have a mechanic, a loom fixer, be the man. But the women, the women, I mean, they could weave, and we had what they call battery tenders, it's a, this is what takes this bobbin out here, and it's on a magazine, a round, number two weave they were round magazines, but number five, where they had four different colors, it was a transfer magazine and there's four things. And they were built, so anyways, but these were battery tenders, they would change, they would fill, as we run our looms these would automatic empty out, and then they had to replace them. And if you were a good weaver, and I was a, the weavers were paid on picks, that means we were paid on the, we had a clock on every loom and every time we had a pick, it'd change, probably every time it did a hundred picks, it would change one number.

So we were paid by this, so if this machine was down for a mechanical problem, or else something, we would lose two hours. So there were some weavers that didn't know how to weave good, or else they were still apprentice, and they didn't put enough production out. So, but there was others, like in my situation, I had a family, I had, I got eight children of my own, and I had a family and I was working the, working the night shift on top of that, and I used to run, I wouldn't take no breaks or nothing. And so naturally, the ladies that would change these bobbins, well they couldn't take a break either. Because we would tell the boss, look, so and so was down in the lunch room for an hour, and my batteries are getting empty, my looms are down, you know. And so a lot of these women, they were -

SH: The were battery hands.

AC: Battery (*unintelligible word*). They were weavers, and if you go down to the cloth room, number five cloth room, there was mostly all women, stitching blankets, you know, making the collars, putting the fringe on it and inspecting and all that, there was

mostly all women.

SH: Who in your mill was admired, or like, and then like who was looked down upon?

AC: Well there, like, it seems though that since the weavers were the ones being paid by the picks, this and that, if we lost money because of a fixer, we would report it to the boss. This and that, why was that machine down for so long? And then there were other ladies, they were what they call room girls. If you had more than fifteen thread broke, it wasn't the weaver's job to pass that, it was this room girl, to come in and pass it, what they call a smash. If you smash more than fifteen ends, or else if you had one of these shuttles that would go all the way across because the loom didn't stop right, they would have to come in and patch it up, fix it up and all that. And that's, in the meantime it's our job, it's, the weavers were losing money because, you know, we can't find the room girl, you know.

SH: And that job was always filled by women, the room girl?

AC: No, there was some men on those, yeah, but most of them was women.

SH: Who was more inevitable to be the boss, was it -?

AC: Well, we had, in my situation we had an overseer, Mr. Lauten, he was an overseer. Under him there was another supervisor, yeah, so you had to go through this supervisor to get the overseer. And usually the overseer, you won't see him unless your production's down or you do bad quality work, see. He's the one that has the final say if you're going to leave, if you're going to, you know, if you come in late or if you take too much time off, you know, they want to know why, why ain't you there.

And in my situation, I was working second shift. In those days, they used to pay

with money, cash money, it was cash money. And they used to pay us on Thursday, you know, so Friday a lot of these people wouldn't come in. So this would give me some overtime, see. So I mean, you could work the eight hours of the other shift, or you could work four hours. And like I say, I needed the money so if the guy wanted to go out and do his thing Friday night, you know, these machines had to run steady. They run twenty four hours a day.

SH: So there were some people that worked after midnight through the morning?

AC: Oh yeah, yeah, we had, when I first started there I was working third shift, eleven to seven o'clock in the morning, you know.

SH: Did you know anything, or, let's see, how about, do you think that the workers were overworked while you were there?

AC: Well, we, there were some that was overworked, especially if you had, there was cloth doffers, you know, when a roll of cloth gets to be a certain size it has to come off the weaving machine. And there's some of these rolls, they weight two or three hundred pounds apiece. There was usually a team of 'em, two of 'em, you know, and they were mostly young people because the old people, I mean, they knew how to do it, but the young people was more, you know. And there wasn't really overwork, but if they had X number of cuts to take off, the roll are cuts, you know, they would work straight for eight hours without a break.

And if there are, the way the machine was designed in those days, you could only make a, probably only eight bedspreads on one roll. Because if you let it go longer than that, there's a bar underneath that would cut the cloth. So you had to get the cloth doffer, say, hey, this one's got to come off. Well, I don't have time now, so we have to leave it stop, otherwise it would be making a second.

They have quality control in there, and one time they hired thirty quality control people. They would come in and they would time us for four hours, mark every little thing we did. If you happened to tie a knot too slow, you got to find a way to tie it longer, you know. And you have to, part of the job as a weaver, you had to inspect the front and the back of the loom, to see if there's any waste coming up, or if the, you know, if it's making bad cloth. And my hands used to be so tender, and on the sheeting, you know, I would do a, when it stopped weaving and the loom stopped and the thread would break and it would snap, I wouldn't have to look for it. I would go down then all of a sudden I could feel it, where the thread or whatever broke right there.

But a lot of them had to go in the back, and what they had on these threads, they had what they call drop wires, and when this drop wire, when the thread broke this drop wire dropped, into a set of gears you might say, it's a flat set of gears. This is what stops the loom. And sometimes when they used to get dirty with waste, they would ride up, the gear would ride up a little bit so it would not stop. And sometimes you got a dozen thread coming out, and if you looked at a sheet or something, you can tell if there's a thread missing. I can tell, see. But with the drop wires still running up and the ends moving, so as you walk down the front of the loom, I would put my hand, all of a sudden, well, there's a thread missing there. So I would stop it, because it didn't stop automatically. But there was a lot of good weavers that way, they could tell the quality.

SH: Did your father ever speak about how it was harder for him? I mean, because without, he probably felt the effects of, you know, no union more maybe? Did he?

AC: Well, it's like I say. Before, they had no protection, the workers had no protection. If your supervisor didn't like you, and it' just like any other thing, if you had a supervisor that, you know, favored another person better, you know, they would be knocked down for whatever reason.

SH: Do you know anything about illegal discharges into the river during those days?

AC: Well, when I was living at Turner, we had Robinson, he traveled with me from Turner, we were working the second shift. He was working in the Bleachery, downstairs where the dyes and all that? And they, at one time it was going in the river. Then all of a sudden the, he told me one time that, you know, we can't dye any more until we find another solution to get rid of our byproduct.

SH: Why did they have to change?

AC: Because of the environment. Yeah, because there's some of these chemicals, I mean, we had chemists there and they had their own office, and you could see all the different kinds of chemicals there in those office. And there must have been some that wasn't really too, too, you know, good.

SH: So in your father's family, and in your family, when your father and your mother both worked in the mill, who took care of like organizing the money and all that stuff, your father?

AC: Well, with a family, I mean, of that size, I mean, my father, he was a good weaver, and then when he went to the shipyard he was a good welder. He's a carpenter, he helped me build my house, this and that, but he wanted a union. And, because we had a little more benefits. When the union come in we had a little raise, plus we had a small medical thing. And the bosses couldn't fire you unless they had a real good, I mean, the only way they could really fire you, if you stole something or else if you really harass somebody.

SH: Do you have anything else that you, you know, I mean, like favorite experiences in the mill that you'd like to share?

AC: Well, like I was working one and two weave, which is, number one is what they used to make the rippet, I don't know if you know what a rippet, it's a sheet with ripples in it. The hospitals have those, and they were making hospital sheeting, and they were making a lot for the service, the service on the ships and all that. So we had a small room, there was fifty of these sheeting, of the rippet. And then the other big room, number two weave room, which all, was all plain weave was sheets, pillow cases and this and that. But what was the question again? I got distracted.

SH: Well, it was, you know, any special experiences.

AC: Well, we had the Caron family, there was, the whole Caron family, there was Emil, there was Rog I think, his sister, and when the Continental Mill shut down, the Bates mill went from shuttles – no, they st-, yeah, no, they still were using shuttles but instead of having an automatic battery hand, they put what they call a Unifill. It was, so the brother from the Continental come up and put all these new Unifills on our loom, about a hundred of them, which eliminated one of the things.

But there was a, the Belanger family, they were farmers in Lewiston, they're still farming now and this and that, and he was a fixer. And his brother-in-law, Landry, was a fixer. And they were, they were pretty good workers, but you could never find them when you wanted them. You know what I mean? They were farmers during the day, and at night they used to come in for an hour or two, then for next three or four hours you couldn't find them.

But there was some, you know, there was, if you call that an experience, you know, there was some people, I mean I don't want to pick out anybody special, but it was mostly a family affair. Once we get to, get to know your workers, because in my being a weaver, you had to work as a team. You had to have the weaver, you had to

have the fixer to fix your loom, you had to have the battery hand to fill your batteries, you had to have the cloth doffer to cloth the thing, you had to have the greaser and cleaner to clean your looms, doff your things. And if one of those, you know, didn't do their job, the weavers would be, you know, the loser.

And it was all kinds of experiences. Like you say, I've worked in the, not only in the weave room, but when the weave room shut down they put me in the spinning room, they put me in the card room, the pick room, the cloth room. And I remember one year, before I worked, I went to Connecticut, I got laid off one year at, in the weave room. Anyway, so it was in April, so I went down to Connecticut and, because they were asking for all kinds of, you know, Royal Typewriters and machine shops and all that. And when I got down there I couldn't get a job in these machine shops. I landed up in the mill, the Manchester Knitting Mills, in Manchester, Connecticut. And they jacquard weave there, but they were doing a lot of nylons, rayon, and they were making parachutes for the service.

SH: Really? Interesting.

AC: And then when the Hill Mill, I think it's the Vietnam War, they were making material for shirts, khaki pants and all that, and the Hill Mill workers were so tired of working overtime, people, they asked for people at Bates to go in on weekends to work there. So if there was work, if you was willing to work you could find work to do, you know.

But as far as, there wasn't too many bad experience. There was a lot of these little French people, they're really stubborn, you know, set in their ways because they, you know.

SH: What was your favorite -?

End of Side A

Side B

AC: . . . way back, I don't remember what year it was, but we had, every year they used to give us a party. I think a couple of years we had an outing someplace, and we had this and that. But one year they had, they used to hire the Civic Center, where the ice hockey thing is here, and we used to have a party, and we had somebody from France come over. What's the name of that Frenchman there, that come over and entertained for us?

SH: A woman?

AC: It's a man. Anyway, so we did have quite a few get togethers. And there were some, like we had, my, there was, in my, in our weave room there was Eddie Lagrange, and there was three or four that, we were having our children about their children about the same, we'd do things. Eddie Lagrange, we all had to work part time, see. I worked as a, I worked in a cabinet shop, after working all night at the Bates Mill I used to go assemble cabinets, you know, needed the money. Even though we made pretty good money, it was still not enough to, and so this Eddie Lagrange, he was a teacher. So we went out with him, and he's the one that taught my daughter the guitar, and he taught my son the organ, and my other one, Johnny there, we were going to teach him to play the banjo but it never panned out.

We did have a lot of, a get together with these other people. There was other couples that, you know, once we'd get together and we had the same interest, we did go out. But the mills had some good parties, you know.

SH: Yeah, we saw pictures in the museum. The hockey team, we saw a picture of the hockey team.

AC: Yeah, that was before my time. Yeah, yeah.

SH: So how long did you work, total, in the Bates Mill?

AC: Well, I got a total of twenty nine years, but the thing is, I left, I think they made a mistake there. I left at, I don't remember what year I left. I used to get laid off and come back. When I went to Connecticut for six months, there was no work up here so I landed down there, so, I didn't like the mill down there because I was one of the new ones, I mean, I had all the dirty jobs. I couldn't get a job weaving, I was just, just a spare hand doing different stuff, taking off cuts and this and that. Anyway, and it wasn't that kind, that kind of work didn't pay that kind of money.

So I came back I think on the Labor Day weekend, I called my overseer, I says, Mr. Lauten, I says, I'm thinking of coming back to Maine, do you think there'll be a job at the Bates? He says, well, you come in Tuesday, he says, I'm pretty sure we can get you a job. So I went down to Connecticut, and I had, I took my brothers, we had three pick ups, I didn't have too much furniture. So we came back here, so I went back there.

Then back in 19-, I left because with the new management in there, they were getting stricter and stricter. This and that, I mean if you were two minutes late, oh, they put you on the carpet, you know. If you did some bad work or something and they were, they were watching you all the time. And that's when the union was there. And we couldn't work, we couldn't start earlier, we couldn't, you know, you couldn't work on your, they didn't want you to take your break. We had a, we were supposed to have ten minutes every hour, and since I, I'm not a smoker, and the smoke house was right there in my work, I couldn't see all my work for the smoke house.

And these guys would come in, like fixers, take their, the smoke break. The

loom's down because of them. So I used to go sit in the smoke house, this and that, and the supervisor come over, Armand, you don't belong in here. I says, why not, these guys are taking their break. But you don't smoke, Armand, get back to work.

SH: But you couldn't work.

AC: Well, I did, I did, I mean, but I mean, those, that's when the management got a little too strict, you know.

SH: And then why did you stop working at the mill?

AC: I started, well like I say, I left, I had a buddy of mine, he had his own little business, home delivery of milk and stuff, and he come up and gave me an offer that, and I was almost getting tired of Bates Mill, and he offered me more money. And so I stopped there. And then when I went to work for the, I went to work for him for about eight years I guess. Then his business started to fall back down, and so I went back in and go see my overseer there, Lauten, and he said, we don't have no job for you as a weaver, but you can come in as a room girl job, you know, to get me back in the mill. And then I went back in there, then I finally got another job weaving.

And then things were slowing down when the, these, I call them import, the Chinese bought the mill, they stripped the mill right down to nothing. From what I could see, the Bates Mill, even though they were, they used to stock the inventory, you know, especially their expensive bedspreads. Because if the loom is not running, you're not, you don't, what they would do, they would invest in the cotton and they would store, I mean different, like the Martha Washington and the Queens, and the good expensive (*unintelligible word*) while they had the workers.

But when these people come in, from what I understood, they have a lot of

inventory, and they sold all the inventory. And then they would only manufacture what they needed. If they needed X number of blankets, instead of running our regular number of looms, it was about twenty looms, we were cut down to running two looms, because that's all the orders they had for. So they were paying us the same price, paying the fixers the same price, but you're getting probably ten percent of the material, and they wouldn't pay their bills.

So every time we had a shipment of cotton come in, even though it was in the warehouse, we couldn't use it -

(Brief break in taping.)

AC: . . . yeah, anyways, so, and that's when they start laying me off a little bit. And I went to Mechanic Falls and I worked for Auburn Manufacturing Company, and they manufacture fiber, fiberglass, like for the government mostly, and this and that. I went to work there, and this and that. But the work at the Bates was only for one month or two months, then they would call you back in when they had orders, and this and that.

And that's when I started, my wife was working at Bates College and the Bates College was looking for a bus driver, I mean Auburn school was looking for bus drivers, they advertised in the Bates magazine, and this and that. And it was in the spring time I guess she told me about it. It didn't interest me. In the fall she saw the same. In that time I was driving for the church, I was a bus driver for the church. So anyway, so when I went to apply for the bus drivers, I had a little experience there, they helped me get my CDL license, which I had the CDL license but my bus passengers and all that.

So I could see the prints coming on, so I decided, and they were closing more and more, they were always talking of shutting down, and this and that. Then I, that's about the time, 19-, sheesh, I been driving the bus fifteen years this year, so I left there

1985? Yeah, and that's when the, yeah, so, that's when I decided there was no more future.

And then, who is it, Fred Lebel, he started a little business on the side, you know. He's still running some of the Bates fabric stuff, at the Continental Mill there. He called me a couple times to go in to work for him, but I figure my age, I ain't going back in the mill.

SH: It sounds stressful, very busy. Did your parents stay here and retire here?

AC: Yeah, my father retired from the Bates Mill, and my brother, he stayed, my oldest brother, he stayed in the mill until, he retired I think from the mill, that's right, he has a small pension like I do from the mill. But my other brother, Georgie, he went in the service, he didn't stay at the mill. And then my children, I got two of them that went in the mill, but didn't stay.

SH: What positions did they have?

AC: They worked in the weave room, yeah, but they had other, Pioneer Plastic was here, but in the meantime I guess, when they come out of the service, you know, they figure let's go work there, I guess, right? And they didn't, yeah. So I've got one now that works at Tambrand, I got one that works Pioneer Plastic, they all got good, well, they got a better education than I had, so they had the knowledge. And especially the service, to get all the, yeah.

SH: So do you have anything else you'd like to say?

AC: No. Any questions you'd like to ask me?

SH: We've covered a lot. I think that's about all.

(Break in taping.)

SH: . . . because it's my, a gender class, do you feel that women were treated differently, or any -? By the supervisors, perhaps, or?

AC: Well, there were some, like I said, that did favor some than the others. There was an, especially after the union come in, yeah, they, like I say, when I first start to work in there, their rippet, number one weave room, it was a small room, and the humidity in there was, it was awful. See, all through, especially the number two weave upstairs on the second floor, we had what they call an air condition, it was a humidifier, and we had pipes running all over the walls there with steam coming out, whooshing, to keep, the cotton had to be moist, see, to have it, it has to be moist.

When they make a bedspread, they, in the slasher room, where they make the warps, well they have to pass it through the slasher room, which are big, big drums and this and that, and they have to put starch in it to make it stiff enough so it won't come apart. So it actually, but in the weave room, they have to have to have that moisture, the humidity to do this. And if, you take the Queens, it's two bedspreads in one, there's two warps on it. One that is like the sheeting, the background of it, and the other one is the design. The sheeting is a very fine thing which, I don't remember how that works, but I guess the sheeting, which the fine, is, it shrinks. But the heavy cotton on the top, it, what would you call it, it would, not shrink, what's your opposite from shrink?

SH: Expand?

AC: Expand, so this is what made the design so good. And all these, and you have to have the moisture and you have to have the -

SH: So were you really hot all the time?

AC: Oh yeah, I was, oh, over a hundred degrees. And no windows.

SH: Did people ever faint?

AC: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. It got so hot in the summer time that they had to shut down the weave room, yeah. And the other departments it was the same thing, the spinning room, the card room. You go there, it's just like a foggy, you know, yeah. And hot. It was mostly hot, you know.

SH: Anything else we should talk about, you wanted them to know? That was very good.

End of Interview

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