

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

Blanche Legendre
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

MWOH# 033
March 21, 2006

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History Project. The date is March 21st, 2006. Today I'm interviewing Blanche Legendre at her home on Sabattus Street in Lewiston, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by saying your full name?

Blanche Legendre: Blanche Brochu Legendre.

AL: Legendre, okay. And where and when were you born?

BL: I was born in Van Buren, Maine.

AL: And the birth date?

BL: June 16, 1918.

AL: So did you grow up in Van Buren?

BL: I left Van Buren when I was fourteen. We moved to Lewiston. We were eleven in the family.

AL: Eleven kids?

BL: Eleven children, and Mom and Dad.

AL: And what were your parents' names?

BL: Dennis and Malvina Langlais. It's L-A-N-G-L-A-I-S.

AL: And why did they come to Lewiston?

BL: Well, there was nothing for a growing family up there. And I had a sister and a brother older than I was, so they decided to move here.

AL: Was it work related, were they able to find jobs here more easily?

BL: Yes, oh yes.

AL: And what did they do for work?

BL: Well, my older sister worked at the mill also, and also at Pepperell.

(Telephone interruption.)

AL: And so you said your sister worked in the Pepperell Mill, and then later at Bates?

BL: Yes, later at Bates.

AL: What did she do in the mill?

BL: She worked in the winding room, and then she, I don't remember what other room she worked in. And my brother was a weaver at the Androscoggin Mill.

AL: And did he work there a long time?

BL: Yeah. When he left there he worked for Central Maine Power.

AL: Now, when your parents moved here your mother was probably a homemaker, with eleven children.

BL: Yes.

AL: Did your dad find work here?

BL: He was working at the mill also.

AL: The Bates Mill?

BL: Yeah, well not the Bates, the Androscoggin.

AL: The Androscoggin. And what did he do there?

BL: I really don't remember.

AL: And so you were fourteen when you came to Lewiston. What was it like at that time, in terms of the way I see it today?

BL: Well, coming from a small town it felt big. And, but I found work babysitting for, I don't remember his name, I think it was a Mr. Lessard. And I babysat for them, and then when I got older, of course I cheated about my age, and he was a foreman at the mill and he kept telling me, get your birth certificate, and I waited until I was old enough to give him the birth certificate, and I worked summers in the Androscoggin Mill, in the winding room.

AL: At what age was that?

BL: I must have been sixteen.

AL: And you were supposed to be eighteen, was that the rule?

BL: I think then it was seventeen.

AL: So you worked in the winding room. What kind of work was that, what did you do?

BL: We filled in the bobbins for the weave room. And my boss, well the overseer in the weave room was Mr. Fournier, and my boss was Philippon, Ralph Philippon.

AL: And how were they to work for?

BL: Oh, they were wonderful. And then, and that was at Bates now, and then, then I had my daughter, and then my husband went in the service. Well, I had my daughter and I stayed at home for four years, and when my husband was called in the service I went back to work. And I was working I think in the warp room they call it, but I didn't stay there long, I signed up to work in the finishing room. And I used to push those big trucks with all the bedspreads on them, used to push them to the girls that wrapped them up.

And then after that I signed up to work in the Bates Mill store, and I worked there for quite a few years. And then I had a chance to sign up for the sample department, and I worked in the sample department until I retired.

AL: So you were there about forty years?

BL: Just, an average I guess.

AL: And you started in the late thirties, like 1936 or '37, does that sound right, in the summers?

BL: Yeah, yeah.

AL: And looking back at that time and then through the years you worked there, did things change in the mills? What kind of changes were there?

BL: Oh, there was a lot of changes. But all my bosses were very good. I had, I worked for Mert Parker, and I worked for Tom Connelly, I worked for Dick Ricker and Gus Mullen, and Jack Russell, you know, and they were all nice.

AL: Was there a certain job that you liked the best in the mill?

BL: I think the store would have been a good job. I liked meeting a lot of people, made a lot of friends, people from out of town. Used to come back every year from, even in Canada and all that, and they always came to me to be waited on. I retired in 1980, and I met my second husband. He lived in Florida. And we married, and we've been married twenty-one years.

My husband, my first husband died in 1976. And I had three children. My oldest son was in the service for twenty years, he's a retired service man. And then he worked, he moved to Connecticut and he worked for the state of Connecticut in a women's prison. And my daughter, she passed away when she was twenty-eight years old, and she had three children. And when she passed away the kids, she had one son close to eight, and the other one six, and the little one was two and a half. And when their mother died they said, when we grow up we're going to be doctors. Two of them are doctors, one is a nurse. And my youngest son, James Brochu, lives here in Lewiston and he's the one that takes care of me.

AL: Now, did you see over time that the mills were slowing down, or having problems financially? Did you see that as a worker?

BL: No, I really didn't pay too much attention to that.

AL: Do you remember any strikes at the mills?

BL: Oh yes, yeah, I remember a strike. And I didn't belong to the union at that time, and I joined the union, of course, because everybody had to.

AL: What was the strike about?

BL: Must have been wages.

AL: Did you get vacation time each year?

BL: Yeah, one week, two weeks vacation.

AL: And health insurance?

BL: Yes.

AL: I understand that there were social activities that went on in the mills.

BL: Well, I bowled, I did the bowling, and I was a *Bates News* reporter also. Well, I think you would see my picture in there with Hal Gosselin and all of them.

AL: So you reported on news about the mill?

BL: About the people in the mill. When they went on vacations, or whatever they did, you know, they'd tell us. And then we had nice get-togethers, too, you know, and we'd call the reporters. And the bowlers we had, I enjoyed bowling, too.

AL: Did you get, when you bowled, did you get to meet people that you didn't work with every day at the mill and got to know them?

BL: Oh yes, there were some that worked in the office. Quite a few, as a matter of fact. Yeah, Fern Pelletier, and I think he was a designer, and Lafrance, Gerry Lafrance and his wife, and we all -

AL: Jackie?

BL: Jackie, we all bowled. As a matter of fact, I met them not too long ago. I hadn't seen them in years.

AL: Did any of your younger brothers and sisters work in the mill, too?

BL: My sister, the one that, younger than I am, she worked in the shoe shop. She had gone in the mills for two days and she didn't like it, so she went in the shoe factory. And my brother George owned a grocery store, Union Market. And my sister Lucille worked at Pepperell also, and my sister Doreen had worked at Bates for a while. And my brother Gene was a milkman, and then he worked, he was in charge of the laundry at St. Mary's Hospital, he worked there for twenty some odd years.

AL: Are there things about your time working at the mills that I haven't asked you that you think is important to talk about? Memories you have, or?

BL: One thing, the nurse was a wonderful person. I can't remember her name, though.

AL: So they had a nurse right there at the mill if you got hurt or sick?

BL: Yeah.

AL: Do you remember there being many injuries to workers from the machines?

BL: No, not too many. I know that many years before, when I wasn't working at Bates, my sister was working there, and she was working on the winders also, and she bent down and her hair caught in the wheel and pulled out all her hair, here.

AL: So you had to be careful.

BL: Yeah, but those should have been covered. She had dropped a bobbin, bent down to pick it up, and she had beautiful hair.

AL: Well great, thank you very much.

BL: You're welcome.

*End of Interview
legendre.int.wpd*