

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

Tom LeVeen
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

MWOH# 036
March 31, 2006

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History Project. The date is March 31st, 2006, and I'm here at the Muskie Archives at Bates College with Tom LeVeen, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could I just start by asking you to say your full name and spell the last name?

Tom LeVeen: Yes, Thomas Upton LeVeen, last name is spelled L-E-capital V-E-E-N.

AL: And what is your date of birth?

TL: 4/17/47

AL: And where were you born?

TL: Worcester, Mass.

AL: Is that where you grew up?

TL: Yes.

AL: What was Worcester, Mass. like in the '50s and '60s when you were growing up?

TL: Well, it was a city that was beginning its long slide into decline. It was a heavy manufacturing city, there were foundries and all sorts of heavy manufacturing there that was starting to suffer, I mean, the old Pullman railroad cars were made there. I think in those days, the '50s, it probably had a population of 220,000, and I think today it's probably under 180,000. So it was like a lot of New England cities. I grew up actually outside of Worcester, in a small town, but most activity centered around the city.

AL: And what did your parents do for work?

TL: My father owned an operated a company called Carlton Woolen Mills that was headquartered in the town of Rochdale, Massachusetts, which is about six or seven miles west of Worcester. And my mother was a homemaker.

AL: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

TL: I have three brothers.

AL: So you were four boys.

TL: Four boys.

AL: And so, how did your father deal with the Depression years, does he ever talk about that?

TL: He was just starting in business at that time. He had just gotten out of, graduated from college, and my grandfather had a company that sold woollen fabric, and one of his source of supply in which he had an interest went out of business during the Depression, and my grandfather decided to buy a mill called Carlton. It was owned by a fellow by the name of E. G. Carlton, and they made white flannel for men's slacks and spats.

The product that my grandfather had been, my grandfather's company was started right around the turn of the century, and he sold a product called under collar fabric, which is a product that went under the collars of men's jackets. And it was a very specialized market, and he considered himself the under collar cloth king.

But the mill was in 1934, that they purchased, was, to quote my father, should have been opened as a museum rather than a mill, meaning he had equipment that went back to 1880. And he said that one of the happiest days in his life was when they went out and they bought some new carding equipment that was made in 1915. He said, in one fell swoop I had just become twenty-five to thirty years more modern.

AL: So when he owned the company, did he continue to modernize the equipment over the years?

TL: Yes, over the years it eventually, there was a series of, there was a hurricane back in 1953 that flooded our plant in Rochdale, and came very, it was, it came at a difficult time for the company, a time of peak deliveries to his customers. So as they recovered from the flood, he recognized that he couldn't have all of his eggs in one basket and he bought a mill in Winthrop, Maine so that he would have two sources of supply. And that was all equipped with pretty much state of the art equipment at that time.

AL: And so is that where you got your Maine connection, when he purchased that?

TL: Yes, I had graduated from college and I went to do some post graduate textile engineering work at Philadelphia Textile. I had worked in the mills from the time I was

sixteen on, in summers and vacations, so I'd essentially worked in every department in the mill. My father, I think probably rightly so, gave me just about every dirty job there was to do in the mill. His philosophy was, if I'm going to ask people to do it, I ought to know what I was asking people to do. What was the question?

AL: The question was, did buying that mill in Winthrop make the Maine connection for you?

TL: Yes, it did. And in 19-, we ended up getting into some environmental problems, and due to our proximity to Augusta, and there was a gubernatorial race, the attorney general got after the town of Winthrop and our plant for water pollution, and gave us a cease and desist order. Then we realized, we, it was easier to tackle a small woollen mill than the paper companies, so we worked jointly with several towns and built a pipeline to pipe our waste to Augusta.

At that time we realized that we were probably going to have to do the same thing in Massachusetts, and it would be prohibitive to really put in two of these high quality water treatment systems, and at that time we decided to consolidate more of, all of our finishing operation that used water in Maine.

In 1971 we built what was probably one of the first new mills in New England in thirty years, outside of the Wyandotte facility in Waterville. So we built a 130,000 sq. ft. building, and ultimately the Massachusetts operation was relegated to just making certain fancy products, and the Winthrop operation did all the finishing, all the, what we call piece style work.

AL: And so you said you went to college, and then did graduate studies?

TL: Yes.

AL: And that was in textiles, or -?

TL: Textiles. I actually, I went through a program at Harvard Business School, too.

AL: And so what did you do after that, did you come to Maine?

TL: I worked for two, I worked for the first years in our sales office in New York. That was certainly something that my father felt was critical, understanding, and I had responsibility for three or four of our large accounts that required, you know, constant servicing. One of them was a company called Bobby Brooks, and it was a large manufacturer of junior apparel. I had responsibility to a large degree for our largest customer, who was a distributor of (*unintelligible word*) fabrics for pool tables. And so it gave me a good background. And after two years, the new plant in Winthrop was coming on line, and I moved to Winthrop to help get that staffed and going.

AL: So you started there at the Winthrop plant. And how, at what point did you go to the Bates Manufacturing Company?

TL: In 1980 my family sold the business, and I had, was given a five year contract. At the end of my five-year contract, I had a couple of opportunities. One was to go with another company that ironically enough is, has grown five times over the years, I think employs about twelve hundred people now and is quite profitable. But I chose to go to Bates primarily because it was a, because of the challenge of the situation. I was given the opportunity to actually run an operation. I was relatively young, and it was clearly a turnaround situation, the company was losing money, and I really felt that that would be an excellent test of my management skills.

AL: And what year was this?

TL: Nineteen eighty-four, the end of 19-, late in '84.

AL: And so when you started, what were some of the challenges that you faced?

TL: There were just many. I often describe Bates as like a three hundred pound man that's lost a hundred and fifty pounds. None of his clothes fit quite right. When I got there, I had departments that had one person in it. And these were all residuals of the, of days when they employed thousands of people.

The challenges, my first day on the job was actually doing what we, one of the two market weeks that we have in New York, we had a sales room, showroom in New York, and when I walked into the showroom, there were probably a dozen beds for showing our bedspreads, and all of the bedspreads were white. It looked very industrial, so a fair amount of work needed to be done on the product line. It was just a lot to be done everywhere.

And the manufac-, there were hundreds of looms, I mean I had two weave rooms, each one had a hundred looms in it, and in one case we were running thirty looms in one weave room, and twenty five looms in the other weave room. So the first thing we did was throw out a hundred looms, we basically opened up a whole side of the building and just got rid of the looms.

For a variety of reasons, Bates was technology backward. I mean, clearly very little money had been spent on modernization. I was throwing out looms that were probably made in, in 1984 I was throwing out looms that were probably made in the early '60s. There were probably two or three newer generations of looms that were available.

And there were clearly a number of mistakes that my predecessor had made.

And as I got deeper into the problems that the company was facing, the more I realized that as bad as things looked they were actually a bit worse. Some of the financial issues had been camouflaged. To give you an example of that, I, on one of my, one of my wanderings through the mill in the first couple weeks that I was there, I found a forty thousand square foot floor that had nothing but seconds in it. I couldn't find any record of that in the company books, and it came to pass that none of those seconds had been written down. And some of them were there for a long time. In fact, some of the cartons had pigeon dung on them that was piled up, so they'd been there for years.

Furthermore, each year when new and higher cloth standards were put in, they effectively inflated the value of the seconds rather than decrease the value. So the first thing we really had to do was get rid of, you know, close out a lot of that. So we took a beating, and in the first year I think we lost, oh, I don't know what it was, it was over a million dollars, but at the same time we were generating cash so we really, we were not, we had plenty of cash assets. And we finally recognized all those losses that had probably accumulated over a period of the previous five or ten years.

AL: And can you talk to me a little bit about the ownership of the mills over time, and how that affected what you had when you came in?

TL: I really don't know much about the history. I know that there are probably other individuals that can fill you in on it, but I understand that it essentially was a company that was owned by absentee owners, you know, New York corporations. And it was, when I was there, it was I think five or six, no, maybe seven years into an ESOP, and so theoretically the employees really owned the company. And they incurred substantial amount of debt to buy the company, by the way that they were, the owners overcharged them for the company, they charged more than it was worth.

So one of the big obstacles that we faced when I was there is that we had a huge amount of debt to pay every year, the debt that the employees had incurred to buy the company. I can't remember the exact number, but I think it was like \$980,000 a year. And if you look at it from the point of view of the amount of product that we were making, at one point in time I figured that every bedspread that we made carried, you know, cost an extra dollar and a half to make just to cover the debt. And when we were selling ripcord bedspreads to K Mart for nine dollars, that wasn't, that certainly cut into any profit margin.

AL: And while you were president, did the Tang brothers take over the company?

TL: Yes, they had approached, John Wahl was the chairman and he was my immediate predecessor to running the company, although he was more or less interim president. He had taken over from a fellow by the name of Bill Gleason. John was a fine man, had a very, he was, I think in that time, in those days, he was probably in his mid seventies. And he was doing this out his desire to see the company succeed. It

wasn't, he was there more or less as a caretaker and, though he did a fine job while he was here.

But the Tang owned a company called Minnette, and they had made some of the same products that we did, although they were of much lower quality. And they had an interest in buying the company, and they approached Mr. Wahl and myself, and we turned them down, for a variety of reasons. The offer that they made was insubstantial, we had heard some things about their business practices that turned us off and, you know, we really didn't have any confidence that they could do any better than we were doing.

It was clear from the, basically from the, almost the day I started, I had a meeting with the Farmer's Home Administration, who was the guarantor to the employees' \$7.5 million loan. And they made it clear to me that they wanted the company sold so that they, they didn't perceive that the company would survive.

So after John Wahl and I turned the Tangs down, they started to work behind our back and worked on, the Farmer's Home had a consultant by the name of Jeff Cahill, and Jeff was supposedly helping us sell the company to a, you know, a larger home textile company. We looked at, we talked to Spring's, we talked to West Point Stevens, we talked to Bib, we talked to a lot of people and frankly there wasn't, there wasn't much interest. They were interested in some of our products, but certainly, you know, a walk through the mill and looking at all of this antiquated equipment did not get the juices flowing for many people.

Anyway, Cahill, unbeknownst to me, had, was holding kind of secret negotiations with the Tangs, and I was called in to a meeting with the Farmer's Home and basically told that I had to sell to the Tangs. So I did. I mean, I, under some protest, I really didn't have much choice. So that's how they ended up getting in there.

AL: And what was that transition like? Were they owners that were on site sometimes?

TL: They were on site too much. I was still president of the company. They, I had a two year contract with them, but their business practices were bizarre at best. One of the brothers was absolutely nuts. And I certainly didn't subscribe to what they were doing. It made very little business sense, and it became apparent after a very short period of time that I didn't think I was going to be able to fulfill my two year contract to them.

I didn't like that they were, they had absolutely no feeling for the people, they had no respect or understanding of contracts, they had no respect or understanding for the union. And, to give you an example, one of the brothers came to me one day and said, you need to go, there's an elderly woman that I want you to fire. And I said, why?

She's moving too slowly. And I said, we can't do that, that we have, we don't fire people because they're moving slowly or they're old. And he had a temper tantrum. That's just one example, but this went on, there are many, many examples of what they did. And I, you know, a lot of it is, would defy any rationalization.

AL: So did you feel that, did you have a sense of whether they had more interest in the Minnette company than the Bates Mill? Or was it just the way they did things?

TL: I don't think it's either. I just, I really don't know quite what they were thinking. I mean, it's just, you know, the Minnette Mill they ran into the ground, too. It, you know, it was, at the very beginning we each had a sales force, and they decided to combine the sales forces, and of course a number of my sales people were let go. And some of these were, you know, particularly good sales people. I mean, we really didn't have any input in that .

They had a couple of very talented sales people. And certainly that is one thing that you could rationalize, that you know, part of the synergy of the two companies is that the Minnette product line was really more popular priced, and ours certainly was more department store. They had placement at the mass merchants, and combining the sales forces, you know, did make a lot of sense. Although I didn't appreciate some of their choices, but certainly that was their prerogative to do and I think if I'd been on the other side of the table I would have probably done the same, I would have done the same thing. So, that's about one of the few things that they did that I could agree with.

AL: Now, did you make it through your two-year contract?

TL: No, no. There was a series of incidents. One of the brothers, on one day we had a credit review meeting. And we went down and, down the list, and I don't know, I don't know what this fellow's problem was but at the end of this he said, you know, a guy was three or four days late on a payment, he's no longer a customer. At the end of the day I think we lost about forty five percent of our customers, and some of these had been customers of Bates for twenty-five or thirty years.

Or if, you know, we had made a shipping mistake and had to, or something like that, and had to issue a credit, he'd use that as a reason to get rid of customers, saying this guy's a problem. It was, it was really bizarre, it was kind of a Black Tuesday, I remember, that all of a sudden, you know. And I was given the task to explain this to the sales force, and certainly I, it was, that was very difficult to do.

Another incident was one day I walked out of the, I was walking out of the front steps of the plant and there was the TV news people. And unbeknownst to me, one of the brothers had decided to increase the health insurance premiums by, you know, some ungodly amount. And after we had, you know, we were running a deficit in our retirement, in our account for our retired employees, but we had a, we had presented a

plan to this brother that showed that within two years we could get things back on track without causing any undue harm to our employees. Well, he decided on his own to jack it up and try to get all the money back in a couple of months. And that was leaked to the news, and I was greeted by the news and I realized that this is, this is bizarre, this is no way to treat people.

And I got along a bit better with the other brother, who was in Hong Kong at the time, so I wouldn't, I had prepared to resign and I was waiting for the other brother to come back from Hong Kong. I didn't want to give the nutty brother the satisfaction of taking my resignation.

AL: Now, in your years at the mill did you get to know the people who worked there, and get a sense of the Franco-American community?

TL: Very much so.

AL: Can you talk to me about -?

TL: Well, you know, it was, I think, one of the interesting things, one of the, when I got down to Bates and I looked around, there are companies that should survive and there are companies that should fail. I mean, there's sort of an economic Darwinism. And based on that, certainly Bates was in the category that should have failed. It was a, the investment hadn't been made in the company, you know, the sales in their primary product line had been declining for years. And if you were to look at a graph of woven bedspread sales, it looks just like a ski jump going downhill. And, you know, that was primarily because of other products taking the place, like comforters and quilts and other products like that. It wasn't necessarily a reaction to the Bates and the Bates quality, but you know, fashion and other things had dictated.

On the other hand, I think the average age of the employee was like fifty-six or fifty-seven. In other words, these are all people who had given their lives to the company, that were close to earning their retirement. And for that reason alone, I think the company was worth saving. So, you know, these were all, you know, very, very good employees. I mean, obviously as the company had shrunk in size, generally the younger employees were the first to go.

It was a very interesting community, and certainly, you know, there was a work ethic, there was attention to detail, you know, that I don't think you'd see in many places. I mean they, Bates made a very fine bedspread, not because that it had fine equipment, but it had fine craftsmen.

AL: You've worked in other mills in other places.

TL: Yes.

AL: Was there, is there a different sense of the people, or did you feel like the people in Winthrop, Maine had the same work ethic?

TL: I think it had changed. Our work force in Winthrop was a little bit different. In the mid '70s we, well it's interesting. When we set up the new, what we called the new mill in Winthrop, in 1973 or '72, we created about a hundred and twenty five new jobs, and we had a terrible time getting that plant up to any sort of productivity. We went through four hundred and seventy five people in the first year, to get a hundred and twenty five. We had people that would work for two or three weeks and quit. We had people that we had hired for, you know, fired and hired back because we needed the warm bodies.

And it was a different sort of mix of workers. Certainly we had a Franco community, but we also had a very large Vietnamese community. We had, in our spinning and carding operations we probably had fifteen or twenty percent of the employees were Vietnamese. So it was much different. Obviously we were growing, so we were adding people, and Bates was declining and they were not adding people, so.

AL: When you talk to some of the people who had worked at the mill for a long time, did they tell you stories about the mill in the old days, do you recall?

TL: Yes, but, I don't recall any specific stories, but certainly, you know, there was a sense of tradition. I mean, in many cases we had, these were, their families had worked at the mill. And we had, and they were maybe sons and daughters or nephews or, everybody seemed to have somebody that had worked at the mill at one time. I still that even today. Oh, my great uncle used to work in the mill, he was a weaver, he was, whatever. So yes, there's a strong sense of tradition.

AL: During your time as president, are there stories or recollections that you have about things that happened that stick out in your mind that you could talk about? I know you've had some examples from the Tang brothers. Were there things before that?

TL: Well, just that, you know, it was a very busy time. I mean the company was changing pretty dramatically, you know. It was, I think we, when I took over there we had about four hundred and thirty employees, and in restructuring the product line we ended up probably laying off about fifty people, and then gradually as business began to improve and we added new products, we were back up close to that four hundred and twenty five mark before the Tangs took over.

My primary recollection is there was just an awful lot to do. I mean, there was a, I fortunately had the help of Fred Lebel, who had been fired by Mr. Gleason and John Wahl and I hired him back. Which was really very, you know, a tribute to that, I mean Fred's family had worked in the mills. And I remember the day he came back and walked out in the mill and there were banners saying, welcome back Fred. And, you

know, from the workers, so I mean that was, that said a lot about one of their own coming back. So Fred did a lot of the manufacturing sort of stuff and, you know, I had to work on the finance, the relationships with the banks and the creditors.

But more importantly, you know, we were doing product lines, we were doing our sales structure, and looking for new opportunities. Rather than a company that was hopelessly dependent upon bedspread sales, we were developing other products that our equipment could make.

AL: Like? Do you have examples?

TL: Well one, this actually ties into the Tangs. We had developed a hundred percent polyester jacquard fabric, I had seen a sample in a textile show in Germany where the fabric was, the yarn was printed on before it went into the loom. And when you wove a jacquard pattern over these random prints, you would get some very unique effects. At the same show I ran into a person that used to be a customer of mine at Carlton, and she was excited about it so when I got back from the show I found that there was one company in the country that had this warp printing capability. And not only that, but they had one machine that they weren't using, and they agreed to let us put it in our plant, we would pay them so much a yard that we printed on it. And they gave us all the engraved rolls, and we constructed a line, a complete line for the company called Design Techs.

The opening order was like four hundred thousand dollars, it was a very profitable item, and these cubicle fabrics were used in, primarily in health care facilities. What was unique was that we had the capability of making something that was seventy-two inches wide, which a lot of the jacquard mills did not. So it gave us a unique capability, and the idea then was really to exploit those unique capabilities. Most jacquard weaving for upholstery and other things were, the looms were much narrower.

So this is right around the time that the Tangs were getting involved. This program probably would have generated, would have been, I had four or five, I had Steele Case that was interested, and I had four or five other customers that were very interested in the product, and the idea was really to get it off the ground with Design Techs. And I remember taking the first six samples down to New York to show them, and they were blown away by them, they loved them. And I think that there was a total of thirty designs that they had picked, so it was a large line, and it was going to be part of a large brand new collection that they were coming out with.

So that night I came back, I think my plane landed at ten o'clock at night in Portland, and I decided to go by the mill. I was excited and I wanted to see my samples weaving. And when I went down to the mill at about eleven, I found that the looms were shut off and I asked the weaver, I figured maybe they'd run out of yarn or something. Because there was a, we were under something of a deadline to get this collection out.

Next morning I went in and the looms were still down, and I went to talk to them and the head of the weaving department said, you need to speak to Mr. Tang about that.

So I went into Mr. Tang's office, I said, you know, "We're really off to a good start, I need to get those looms," when he says, "we're out of that business." Just like that. I said, "What do you mean we're out of that business?" He said, "We're not going to make cubicle fabrics." I said, "I have an order." And the upshot of it was that, you know, if I had backed out on Design Techs, the lawsuits would have been flying, and there was no changing Mr. Tang's mind, even though this was a, you know, a wonderful product for this mill.

At the end of the day I found another weaver who, and I gave them all the designs, I sold them all of our yarn, so the Tangs actually ended up not being out of pocket anything except the labor we'd done in developing the designs. That collection ended up, within next year, winning the International Designer's Gold Award. The company I gave the product line to generated I think twenty-eight or twenty nine million dollars of sales in that product line over the next seven years. So it was a, on the one hand it was gratifying to know that it was successful, but that was all success that should have been Bates'. So.

AL: Is there parts of your history and knowledge that I haven't asked you about or known to ask you that you feel is really important to add to this history today?

TL: No, I don't really have any, anything that specific. It was an interesting, it was certainly an interesting project, I mean both from restructuring the manufacturing operations, restructuring the marketing. I mean, certainly there was capability there, there was talent. And we really tried to, started to try to merchandise the company around capability.

For example, we had four looms that hadn't been run for eight or ten years, and they were tied up with a very special tie that, they were formerly used to make table cloth. And there was a time in which Bates had a tablecloth line, and I found the product in the archives and they were wonderful, I think rayon and cotton damask tablecloths. And there were four looms there, this is a, I figured that we could figure out how to get those looms running, hadn't run for as I said, ten or fifteen years, so we created a line of tablecloths.

And it was interesting because people, you know, it was a difficult fabric to make, people said, well we can't make that, and I said, well, go to the archives, I said, well, you used to be able to make it. And that was the only challenge that people needed. So those were the, that was, you know, changing kind of the philosophy in terms of trying to merchandise for specialized niche markets and, you know, broadening out away from the bedspread market. We were working on some blanket products, we were working on a number of different things, they were working on geotextile products.

So, one of the other things that I had done is that I, my predecessor Mr. Gleason had shut down the yarn making equipment. Well, this was probably the most modern equipment in the mill, if we had open end spinning. And we did an analysis and found that for certain counts of yarn, not for all the yarn, but for certain counts of yarn it was far more cost effective to make our own yarn than buy it. So we did. And that meant starting up equipment that hadn't been run for a while.

It was an interesting project. Everything had to be looked at. I remember at one point, when I first got there we had three cost accountants. But the cost system was very much screwed up, I mean everything was, they carried everything out to four decimal points. And four decimal points is relatively meaningless if you're selling a forty-dollar bedspread. The thing that I found was curious was that they could take it out to the fourth decimal point, but they couldn't tell me if it was right in the tens column.

So, at one point in time we were able to get a, we got a seventy five thousand dollar grant from the Trade Assistance people, and we used part of that money to have a big accounting firm in, out of North Carolina, come up and put a new cost system in. It wasn't a lot better, but essentially, when Fred and I, Fred Lebel and I were coming up with a new product we would do it on the back of an envelope and probably were a lot closer than the cost system.

When I took over there, we had an old Sperry Univac computer. I don't know if it had vacuum tubes, but I suspect that it might have. I had a data processing manager, an assistant manager, I had three keypunch people, and two programmers, so I had a department of six or seven people. We were still doing, we still were doing a card system, punch card system. And this is in 1984. So that, we were able to get rid of that computer system and put a modern computer system in, and that essentially saved quite a bit of money for the company because we really only required one or two people to operate it.

A lot of little things like that. I mean, it wasn't rocket science. And they were things that should have been done, you know, long in advance of my being there. So, you know, I don't take, it's hard to take credit for doing something that's obvious.

AL: And I have one more question, and you were here in the later years so this, you might not have any recollections. But if there are people who worked with you, who were integral to the operation of the mill who have passed away and I can't interview, if you have recollections of anyone like that that you could talk about and describe?

TL: Well, there was one fellow, there are a couple people. There was fellow by the name of Fern Pelletier, and he was our lead jacquard designer. And he was a very clever fellow, and he was very good at what he did. I mean we, when we talk about a level of craftsmanship, you know, he was really quite capable. And he actually passed

away while I was there. And I was really quite concerned, because it was the type of skill that people weren't teaching anymore, I mean, how do you transfer a design to point paper.

And I'm not sure if you've ever seen the old fashioned point paper, it is a, they generally are huge. You know, a bunch of red and black squares, and that had to be, it's a very complicated piece of job, and I kept thinking that, there were two good things about Bates in those days. That the barrier to entry for competition to make a bedspread was generally pretty high. We figured it cost us about, oh, forty to fifty thousand dollars to bring out a new design. Because when you brought out a new design, a bedspread like Queen Elizabeth might have twelve thousand punch cards in its design. So you've got to do the design work, you've got to cut the cards, and you've got to do it for all four sizes, because we were making four sizes. So from that point of view, you know, to amortize that cost the thing really has to be kind of a winner, you have to really hit, you have to hit home runs most of the time.

And that was also driven by the fact that, you know, that design function was critical insofar as there weren't a lot of people out there like Fern Pelletier that could do the work. He was teaching his daughter to do it. As it's turned out, today everything's done on a computer, so it's basically taken that, obviously you have to have computer skills, but the skill level of coming up with a jacquard design today is far less than it was when you had people like Fern Pelletier.

The other person that has passed away is John Wahl, fellow that hired me. John came out of Globe Albany in Monmouth, he was I think president of Globe Albany, and he was retired. And I think he joined the board of directors at Bates really out of community service. His background really was, well his background, he was in the woolen business at one time, he managed a plant over in Winooski, Vermont. And he was really more into industrial products, I mean, at Globe Albany they made tennis ball felt, and filter fabrics, and paper maker felts. None of those products had any element of design. And the first, as I mentioned the first day going into the showroom and seeing all white bedspreads on the, in the showroom floor (*unintelligible word*) Mr. Wahl's industrial background.

But he was a, you know, I think he, he worked hard, he believed in the company, and I think he was very relieved when I came on board. It wasn't very long before he was really there for, working with me for, was a matter of weeks, he said, well, he was going away for a month. And then he really never came back very much, so. And ultimately he resigned as chairman of the board and I guess I by default took over that role, too.

But it was, but he, you know, he gave a lot of time and effort at a time when he could have been relaxing and retiring. And he believed in the company. He was a very nice man, good person.

AL: Great, thank you very much.

TL: Okay.

End of Interview
leveen.int.wpd