

**BRICK WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

Ray Brackett

(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

#18

September 10, 2008

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Brick Makers Oral History Project for the Museum L-A. The date is September 10th, 2008, and I'm at the home of Raymond Brackett in New Gloucester, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Ray, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Ray Brackett: Raymond L. Brackett.

AL: And where and when were you born?

RB: December 11th, '34.

AL: And where?

RB: Right here.

AL: Right here in this house?

RB: Yup.

AL: You were born at home?

RB: Yup, yup.

AL: And you grew up here, so you lived here all your life?

RB: Yeah.

AL: Now, is there farm land with this house?

RB: Yeah, seventy-five acres.

AL: And have you farmed it over the years?

RB: No, not yet.

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

RB: Two, two sisters. I got one living, and she lives up in Norway. My sister lived down the trail and she died a year and a half ago.

AL: And what were your parents' names?

RB: Leveret Brackett and Aretta Brackett.

AL: And what did they do for work?

RB: Well, my father worked in the woods mostly. He did work down to Portland in the shipyard when I was little, and before that he worked in the woods, and after that he worked in the woods. And my mother used to do camp washings in the summertime, and later on she worked down to Poland State School for quite a few years.

AL: And when you grew up, where did you go to school?

RB: Right down here, before you get to the grange hall (*unintelligible*), and then they moved us up to Shaker Village in that school, and then after we got in the eighth grade we up to upper Gloucester, in high school.

AL: It's beautiful back here.

RB: Oh yeah.

AL: Yeah, very peaceful. So what did you do after you left school?

RB: I worked at Morin Brick Company.

AL: Right out of high school, or even in high school?

RB: Well, I quit the first year of high school and I went and worked down the brickyard.

AL: Okay, about age fifteen, you'd say?

RB: I was about eighteen years old when I went down there, but before that the farm up here, Harry Merrill's farm, I used to work up there.

AL: What'd you do up there?

RB: Oh, pick apples and did farming work, haying and stuff like that. Then I, when I got older I went down to Morin Brickyard and worked, because my father worked for a, in the woods for a guy – what in the hell was his name, George (*name*) – and he cut

wood for Morin Brick Company, and my father got me the job down there. And I worked there for, oh, I don't know, quite a few years. I quit in the winter time because they didn't do nothing, and I always went back in the spring when they started up.

AL: Now what kind of things did you do at the brickyard, what was your job?

RB: Well, the first, I worked around the yard, didn't, because they had a sawmill at the time and – Albert? Fred? Geez, I can't remember the other guy. George? I don't think his name George though.

AL: Albert and Fred.

RB: Yup, he had, the guy I'm trying to think of but I can't remember his name, had charge of the lumber department. Of course he knew my father worked in the woods, so he'd (*unintelligible*) me down to the sawmill, and I kept the logs rolling down for him and stuff, and when they were done with me I went back in the yard. And then I left to work on the turnpike, when they opened. I was, I walked the whole length of that turnpike, eight miles a day, putting a chalk mark for the white line. And then when it come winter time, when it opened up, I worked there, but come spring and I didn't like that, you go around, you have to ride, just like these guys, they ride around and they don't do nothing. I was a worker. So I got done, went down and drove a forklift, down to the brickyard for, I don't know, three or four years. And then I went nights burning brick. I don't know how many years I worked there, but quite a few years I worked there.

AL: Building the kilns as well as fueling them?

RB: Yeah, I used to set brick stock, but mostly I cooked them, to the last of it.

AL: Because, so they had to have somebody there twenty-four hours a day, right?

RB: Oh yeah, we had a day crew and they had a night crew.

AL: And you were the night crew. Wow. So how long a process was it, once you started burning the kiln until they were baked?

RB: Oh, it must've been, I really don't know for sure but I'm going to say it was two or three weeks, all day long, all day and all night. It was, I'm going to say it was two, two and a half weeks or three weeks. It took a long, quite a while to cook them, yeah.

AL: Can you talk about any, was it dangerous at all?

RB: No, no.

AL: Because I know they got really hot, you had to be careful.

RB: Oh yeah, they're hot, you had to, I was what they called the – I can't remember what they called it – but they had big chunks of wood, and you had a pole with a pick on the end of it, and you had to push them into the middle of the kiln, and the other guys come behind you and throwed slabs at it, on top of one another. But you had to wear leather pants, because it got hotter than hell pushing them junk, well I think it was, oh, probably that big around. I can't remember what they called them, but four foot long, and you had to push three of them in, on each side. You had to go one side, and go around the other side, and come back. So you had to wear leather because your legs, your legs would be goddamn hot they'd turn red. Clips I think they called them, but I ain't sure about that.

AL: Well driving the forklift, was that moving the bricks around the yard?

RB: Yeah, they had a, after when they was getting the kilns ready, you had to, they called it a canopy, and you took the dry bricks and put it in there, and also you took the new bricks they was making in the striking machines out and put them in a rack so they could dry. And you had to keep them going, and you had to keep the canopy going. I done that part three or four years I guess. And then I went nights, burning bricks and stuff.

AL: And then eventually you left the brickyard?

RB: Well, yeah, well it come winter time and I went working for another lumber company driving a logging truck, and then the Army called me in so I never went back to the brickyard.

AL: What year was that?

RB: Oh, Jesus Christ, I was probably, I don't know, I was probably, I'm going to say, see, I started down the brickyard when I was eighteen, and I was probably thirty-one or thirty-two before the Army called me. You have to figure out them years. But, and I never went back there, in the brickyard, I went back in the woods and that's where I stayed.

AL: So you did a lot of lumbering like your dad?

RB: Oh yeah, I worked in the woods, I got my own dozer and stuff and I worked in the woods for quite a few years, yeah. Then I went in the tire business and I been in it ever since, that's what I do now, I'm janitor now though. But I used to work in First National Tire, and when they went out of business I went over to Snowe's, and now it's Stratham Tire, and worked in the cut shop, where they put the tread on the tires. And now I'm over there in Stratham Tire as a janitor, three days, three hours every day, three days. I used to work all day and I says I got too much to do home, I says. I was

gonna get done, he said, oh no, we don't want you to get done. I said, well how about three days a week, and he says, fine, so keeps me busy.

AL: What were the owners of the brickyard like to work for?

RB: Good.

AL: Yeah?

RB: Oh yeah.

AL: And who were they?

RB: Albert Morin and Fred Morin, and I can't remember the third one.

AL: And he's a Morin too, though?

RB: Yeah, he was a Morin.

AL: Okay, I can find out.

RB: I think, let's see, Albert and Fred, and the one that had charge of the lumber department, I can't remember what his name was.

AL: That's okay. But they were nice to work for?

RB: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

AL: Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about your time working in the brickyards that you think is important to add?

RB: No, not really. I think you've asked just about the important questions. But I always liked working down there. And the first year I started there I only got a dollar an hour. And these kids, (*unintelligible*), these kids now, what the hell you bitchin' about, I says, when I started working, I says, I got a dollar an hour. Well I wouldn't work for no dollar an hour. But I made good money, because my father would drop me off about six thirty in the morning, he wouldn't pick me up until after five. Well Jesus, I got, Christ, I was bringing home a hundred, I thought I had the world by the tail end, you know, because I was bringing home a hundred dollars a week. Because I worked, when my father dropped me off I'd start work, and I'd work up until he come to pick me up. He wouldn't pick me up until about four thirty, five o'clock, you know. Geez, I was doing good, I thought. I was eighteen years old and I was making a lot of money, you know. Yeah, I liked working down there.

I went down there here, well then brick I got piled our up there, I went down there to get some brick to put underneath my wood stove – it's altogether different. It's all changed. I was surprised, yeah. That was, what, a couple of years ago I guess, yeah. It ain't nothing like it was years ago, it's all different.

AL: Now it's all automated.

RB: Yeah, all automatic now, yeah. But Christ, when I worked there, there was over a hundred people working there a day.

AL: Really?

RB: Oh yeah, there was a hundred people or more working there every day, yeah. Unreal.

AL: And did they do the wire cut? I mean, yeah, the wire cut and the water struck?

RB: No, not then. Just wire cut, the old fashioned way, years ago.

AL: The water struck?

RB: Yeah, water struck. They had three machines going, yeah.

AL: So it was a busy place back then.

RB: Oh yeah, there was a lot of people working there years ago, oh yeah.

AL: Are there any people still around that you know that worked in the brickyards?

RB: No. Matter of fact, the guy that called me up here, what, a couple of years ago told me about it, and I can't remember his name now. I said, gee, I don't remember you. Well, he stopped in to work and -

AL: It wasn't Monty, was it? Monty Wing?

RB: It could have been. I don't know, because I can't remember names, Christ, I got guys working in there now, I don't know what their names are, just a few of them. But he stopped in, he said, I'm going to stop in. Where are you working? I says, Stratham Tire. Of course I was working five days then. So he stopped in one day and I got paged and I went out, I didn't recognize him. But he knew me, but I didn't recognize him back, because there were so damn many people working there when I was there. I knew when I'd see them, I'd see them out, but what their names was I couldn't tell you. Just like people now, I see them, I know them, they say hi Ray. My wife says, who's that? Guy I work with, but don't ask me what his name is, I can't remember.

AL: Well thank you very much, I appreciate it.

End of Interview
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