

**Armand Turcotte**  
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

**BWOH #26**  
April 3, 2009

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

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview for the Brickyard Workers Oral History Project. The date is April 3rd, 2009, and we're at Morin Brick Company in Auburn, Maine. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today I am interviewing Armand Turcotte. Could you start just by giving me your full name?

**Armand Turcotte:** Armand Turcotte.

**AL:** And where and when were you born?

**AT:** I was born in Lewiston, Maine in 1952.

**AL:** And is that where you grew up?

**AT:** Yes, well I grew up in Auburn.

**AL:** In Auburn. And what were your parents' names?

**AT:** My mother's was May, my father's was Raymond, and my mother was a shoe worker, and my father was a truck driver.

**AL:** Okay, so the shoe industry was important to your family as well.

**AT:** Yes.

**AL:** Do you remember what she did in the shoe shops?

**AT:** No, I don't.

**AL:** Long time ago.

**AT:** Yes.

**AL:** Now, did you have any brothers and sisters?

**AT:** Yes, I have two sisters, and that's it.

**AL:** And so what was Auburn like when you were growing up in the fifties and sixties?

**AT:** Small, compared to what it is now.

**AL:** What part of Auburn did you live in?

**AT:** Right on the Hotel Road.

**AL:** Was the even more rural than it is now?

**AT:** Yes, oh yes. Yeah, there was no businesses up there at all then.

**AL:** Were there other families that lived nearby?

**AT:** Yes, yes.

**AL:** Did you get to, I mean what sort of things did you do as a kid growing up? Did you have lots of fields and woods to play in, or?

**AT:** A lot of fields, a lot of woods, a lot of brooks, a lot of fishing. It was real good, real good.

**AL:** And what schools did you go to?

**AT:** I went to Walton, Fairview, Walton, Edward Little.

**AL:** And what was downtown Auburn like then, did you go there often?

**AT:** Once in a while.

**AL:** Where did people shop for groceries and things like that when you were growing up?

**AT:** You had (*name*) on Minot Avenue. All the clothes and stuff was Kresge's, oh, another one that was on Park Street, I don't remember the name now.

**AL:** Was Peck's still there?

**AT:** Yes, Peck's was there, yup.

**AL:** So you'd go to Lewiston to do shopping?

**AT:** Yup.

**AL:** Now, at what age did you start working in the brickyards?

**AT:** I started down here, twenty-two.

**AL:** Was that your first job?

**AT:** No.

**AL:** Tell me about what you first did? Were you still in high school when you started working?

**AT:** No. Yes, I worked construction for a few years, then I worked at Pioneer Plastics, couple shoe shops, and I started down here in the early seventies and been here ever since.

**AL:** So you've been here your whole career.

**AT:** Yup.

**AL:** Now, what did you do when you first started, and sort of, I want to ask that question, I also want to get a sense of how this brickyard has changed over the years.

**AT:** When I first started here, we was rototilling clay, we had a dry clay product at the time, and we would rototill the clay, on the clay bank, and we would let it dry, then we'd haul it in, put it in a pit, let it soak overnight, and make brick the next day with it.

**AL:** And was it still a manual process then?

**AT:** Yes, yes it was.

**AL:** And so that was your piece of it. Did you go on to do other pieces of the brick making?

**AT:** I manufactured brick, a little, and then in the early fall when we got done making, I came down into the old yard and worked as a fire man on the kiln.

**AL:** And where was that old yard?

**AT:** Well, before you come to the new plant there's an old steel building over there, that was the old yard.

**AL:** So brick making still wasn't a year-round process.

**AT:** No, it wasn't.

**AL:** And your work was mostly done outside?

**AT:** Yes, yes.

**AL:** And so when did it change?

**AT:** I would, '79, when we built this new plant here, and everything's on the inside now.

**AL:** And how did they brick making techniques change as well?

**AT:** Well we went from actually labor intensive to actually less physical labor, more modernization, more conveyer belts, less handling of the brick.

**AL:** Is it still as physically demanding, or not?

**AT:** No, no. You have a couple jobs that are still physically demanding, you have a bundling job and you have a setting job. Other than that, most of it is completely automatic.

**AL:** Are there people, other people that you worked with starting in the early seventies who had been in brick making, from the old days I guess I'd call it?

**AT:** Yes, yes.

**AL:** Can you talk about them a little bit, because we can't, a lot of them we can't interview.

**AT:** Well, a lot of the elderly gentlemen that I started working with were saying that they would start at four o'clock in the morning, they had to shovel clay out of a pit into a machine, and they would make a brick manually on that machine. I think you people had the machine in the museum. I'm not positive, but I think you do. And that was one of the first manual machines they had, making brick. And it was all seasonal back then, too, and it was real hard work. From what I've been told, real physical. Even more compared to when I started here.

**AL:** Were there any particular individuals who were considered, I don't know if legendary is the word, but were there any that people talked about as just -?

**AT:** My supervisor, Dave Chamberlain, when I started here, was a brick maker, and he was an excellent brick maker, I had been told over the years. A great guy to work with.

**AL:** And did you know any of the Morin family?

**AT:** No, I did not, they were all gone by the time I got here.

**AL:** Do you have any stories about your time working in the brick yard, anything that you can recall?

**AT:** I can recall a hot summer day, we used to have two brick machines opposite each other, side by side, and a hot afternoon, they'd be almost done, one crew would start throwing mud at the other crew, and then you had a free-for-all and everybody was covered with mud. And the supervisor, Dave Chamberlain, would come up and start yelling and screaming, and it was all over, nobody got hurt and everybody was just covered with mud.

**AL:** And did it cool you off?

**AT:** No, not really, not really.

**AL:** Are there things I haven't asked you about in the brick making that you think is important to add, are there any techniques or things that you did in making the bricks that you think would be important to talk about for other people to learn?

**AT:** Other than the bricks that they used to make handmade, everybody said they were a lot better looking brick than a machine made brick.

**AL:** And why is that?

**AT:** Well, I would say the brick itself was made, the way it was dumped out of a mold, put on a pallet, I think there was a lot more care.

**AL:** And was there a difference in color?

**AT:** From what we have now to the old skoving kiln, probably there was a little, not by much.

**AL:** So what's the process now? It goes into a big machine to cook?

**AT:** It goes into a – we used to have a scoving kiln, it was a pile the brick, you piled up, you put brick on the outside, and you used to mud it, then you used to have arches and you used to use wood and oil to fire the brick. And after a period of fourteen, fifteen days, the brick were fired and then you had to take all the outside of the brick off, the scoving, to pick the brick, to get the brick to the jobs. Now, the brick are set on kiln cars, they're dried and fired within a week, so it's a lot quicker now.

**AL:** Now are there any, after this, Morin Brickyard went with the technology to make it

more automatic than manual, were there still others that you know of, little brick yards around, that were doing it?

**AT:** Yes, there was, there was Royal River in Yarmouth, they was making water-struck brick. There used to be Dennis Brick right here in Auburn, on Brickyard Circle. That's it as far as I know was, when we were running, when I started here.

**AL:** Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think we should add?

**AT:** Not that I can think of.

**AL:** Now, you mentioned, before we end, you mentioned your dad was a truck driver. Did he work for a company, or was he independent?

**AT:** Worked for a company.

**AL:** And did that take him, where did that take him?

**AT:** Mostly just Maine. Mostly. Back then the trucking industry was regulated and you had certain areas you could haul freight. Now you can haul freight anywhere, so.

**AL:** And your parents' parents, did they come from Lewiston-Auburn area, or had they come from somewhere else?

**AT:** Canada.

**AL:** I think that's all the questions I had, thank you very much.

**AT:** Thank you.

*End of Interview*

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