

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

Helen Little
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

MWOH #026
March 1, 2006

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History project. The date is March 1st, 2006. Today I'm interviewing Helen Little at her home on Pierce Street in Lewiston, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by telling me your full name?

Helen Little: Helen Rita Little. Do you want my family name as well? Helen Rita, well, Mary Ann Helen Rita Grondin Little.

AL: And where were you born?

HL: I was born here in Lewiston. We lived on Park Street at the time. I was born at St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston.

AL: And what's your birth date?

HL: My birthday is 8/1/20, August 1st.

AL: And did you have brothers and sisters growing up?

HL: I had one brother, he was a year and a half younger than I was, and one sister, she was four years younger than I was. His name was Maurice, and my sister's name was Dorothy.

AL: And you mentioned that your mom worked in the mill.

HL: She worked at the Androscoggin Mill for twenty-five years. And she had started weaving first of all, and her legs were bad, you know, and she had to be on her feet. So she had to give that up, and she trained to be a drawing-in hand, it was a sit down job, they put a whole big warp and they had these little, like a crochet thing, and they pulled thread which made a pattern, and then they'd take it to the weave room to weave that pattern into cloth, you know. And during the war they were working on nylon parachutes, over at Androscoggin, so they had a lot of work, they could do a lot of overtime then. And if you were fast, naturally you made more money. It was on piecework. And she was fast.

AL: So, and what did your father do?

HL: My father was a laborer, and he worked for Lewiston Crushed Stone Company, and my uncle was part owner with Mesere Therio (*Monsieur Theriault?*), of Lewiston Crushed Stone. So that was his job.

AL: And you grew up in Lewiston, and what was Lewiston like in the years that you were growing up? In terms of what did you do socially and church functions?

HL: Socially, oh we had all kinds of church functions, and school as well, you know. And then we had a little club that we called Le Foyer Musicale Cadet for the younger generation. It was overseen by the older members, you know, and we, the club rooms were at corner of Chestnut and Lisbon, upstairs, I think it was the third floor. And we had meetings, and we had outings, and it was nice, you know. And we had plays at school, things to keep us going.

And of course in those days you walked, no matter where you went. We didn't have a car, we couldn't afford a car, so you walked. Well, it wasn't bad when I walked to St. Peter's School, and I was there ten years because the nuns taught two years of high school in those days. They called that l'école superior, and I went through ten years. And of course there was more French than English in those days, but we had an English teacher who was an Irish nun, Dominican nun, and she suggested that we speak English during recess time, and asked our parents if we could speak English with our brothers and sisters to get used to conversing in English. And of course my mother approved of that, because my mother was a schoolteacher in Canada before the family came here, she taught school for seven years.

So we had a French newspaper at the, *le Messenger*, but we still had the *Sun-Journal*, too, so we had the two papers. My mother was up on things, she liked to learn her English and all, and she became a citizen. So did my father.

AL: So they had, both were born in Canada and came here?

HL: They were both born in Canada, and the two families came to Lewiston on the same train. They just, and they were on neighboring farms in Canada, so they just pulled up stakes and came to Lewiston. And of course the train went through Allen Pond, Vermont then, that's how the train came this way. And of course then it was the Grand Trunk Railroad on Lincoln Street where they, yeah. And my father's family settled in Auburn on Fourth Street, and my mother's family settled in Lewiston on Park Street, next to the City Hall. That building is still there.

AL: Did they ever talk about why they decided to come to the United States?

HL: They were scratching for a living. Very poor. You know, my father's family, they had nineteen kids. My mother's family, they had six. But, you know, that's what they were looking for, come up here and work in the mills, that's what they were doing then, you know. And some of them would come by wagon even. In the summer time, my mother said, some of them would come up to Augusta.

AL: So when your father came here, did the whole, all the nineteen kids come with him, or -?

HL: No, some had died, you know, but, and of course in those days it wasn't farming here that they thought of, it was the mill and shoe shops. My father went into the shoe shops, and my mother went into the mill. And my father didn't like the shoe shop, he liked to be outdoors. That's why he worked for the Lewiston Crushed Stone, he was outdoors. He felt just like he was, wasn't breathing if he wasn't outdoors, you know. But when he was in Canada, he and his father, they used to build churches and schools and they were away all week, you know, in the city like Quebec and so on. And that's about fifty miles from where they lived in St. Victor, that was the name of the town where they lived. So he, they weren't really farmers, you know what I mean?

AL: Did you know your grandparents at all?

HL: Yes, I didn't meet my maternal grandfather. When he got here he had a stroke and he died. But I knew my maternal grandmother. She died, I was thirteen, and we had gone to Canada to see her. She stayed in Canada. And my grandfather and grandmother Grondin lived right here next to that funeral home on the corner of Pierce there? The next building, that was theirs. So we were just like a block away. Oh yeah, I used to go there for lunch if my mother was working, and my grandmother would say, well, what do you want for lunch tomorrow, you know. So it was fun.

AL: So what was Lisbon Street like when you were growing up? It was very different from today?

HL: Oh, I loved it, especially as I got older. They had everything on Lisbon Street. We had a drug store, Rivard's Drug Store, and then we had another one, another drug store, Pharmacie Nationale, down at that end. And then they had Senter's, this was a department store, they had Benoit's, they had

LeBlanc's, they had B. Peck's, they had Ward's. We could, you know, and then there was a cross the street Reed & Hughs, they had all these stores, everything was available right there. And I used to go when, there was a butter, egg and cheese store at the head of the street, on Lisbon Street, and I'd go on the weekend and buy what we needed, cheese and butter and so on, because I was the oldest of the three so I was running the errands.

And then F. X. Marcotte, on the corner of Lincoln, they used to sell tea by the pound, mixed tea, you know? And I used to go every so often and get two pounds of tea, and they'd give you coupons and you could get kids stuff, you know, like my brother had gotten a little wagon, I'd gotten a baby carriage and a doll, you know, stuff like that. So I was running the errands. And then later on I was going to the bank to pay for the mortgage, too, every month. It was kind of fun. I enjoyed it.

AL: Now, what age were you when you started at the mill?

HL: At the mill? First of all, I was almost sixteen and they hired me at the Androscoggin that summer, I had two years of high school then. So that summer I worked at the Androscoggin on second shift, three thirty to twelve, my girlfriend and I. We were in the winding room on the top floor. Very hot. And the winders, it was like a skein yarn, and it would unwind and make bobbins, and there was so much a case we got. We were on piecework, too. Oh, I had those things rolling, let me tell you. And then as soon as everything was good, we'd go and stick our necks out the window to get some air, and we'd turn around and watch. If there was one stopping, we'd go and wind it and start it again, you know. So I was making eighteen dollars a week, which was pretty good.

This was 1936. And my mother said, well, maybe you should stay here and, you know, you can get up to twenty-one dollars. That looked pretty good for the oldest one, you know, earning. I said, Mom, I want my diploma from high school, I got to have that. Otherwise I'm going to stay in the mill all my life like you're doing, you know, and I don't want to do that. So, okay. And I was taking piano lessons, so she said, well, we really can't afford to do everything. Drop the piano lessons. Okay, drop the piano lessons. I had two dresses. One was one piece, the other was a two piece, skirt and top, which I, you know, because at St. Peter's we didn't have no problem, we had a smock, a black smock and a white collar, so we could wear anything underneath. But once you get to high school, you got to dress up a little. That's all I had for those two years. But I made it.

AL: And so what did you do after high school?

HL: After high school? Well, I had to take a commercial course because there was no such thing as scholarships that I knew of, you know. And I really would have liked to go into nursing, but the second choice was commercial, so I did that. And they called me, they had a job opening in the finance company, because I was an honor student, my picture appeared in the paper, they knew I spoke French and English, they offered me a job. So I thought, well, okay, so I took that job. I kept it until I got married, six years. So we went through everything there. They gave us a cashier course because we were handling money all the time, you know, and all that. So I really enjoyed that.

And at the end, the last year, somebody, by then we were at war, you know, somebody in Bath, the secretary quit because they used to go into the Bath Iron Works and make more money in the office there, so the supervisor from Portland, his name was Kelber, Mr. Kelber, wanted me to go work for the manager at the Bath office. Well, I wasn't too keen on traveling, because right away it was seven, you know, putting on more hours and I was getting the same pay. So I had to go, so I went up and the manager was Larry Raymond, I used to work with him in the Lewiston office, and he'd moved to Brunswick and he was managing the Bath office. So I worked, oh, about six months there.

And I was getting married, I'd met my husband a couple years before, and we did it by correspondence mostly because he was in the Navy. And so I said to Mr. Kelber, I'm getting married on October 7th, you'd better get yourself another secretary so I can train her. He said, well, don't have

anyone. They had put ads in the paper and all that. I says, all right, I've got one for you. He says, what? My sister graduated from high school in June, I'll train her for two weeks and she can do this. That's what happened. I trained her and she took my job.

AL: That worked out.

HL: It worked out good, yeah, and she stayed a couple years and then she got tired of traveling, because that adds on more hours, you know, to your day and your week, when you're traveling back and forth. And if you don't have a car, and I didn't, you have to wait for the bus. Oh, that was for the birds. I'd never get home until seven o'clock at night, you know, where I used to get home right after five o'clock. So anyway, that's what happened to that.

AL: And so you got married.

HL: Yeah.

AL: And then how did you come to work in the mill, is that the next job you took?

HL: No, yeah but, that's right, because we were, my husband was in the service so he was on board ship in Philly, Philadelphia, and the ship was in for repairs, going to the South Pacific after that. So I went down, we went to Niagara Falls, and went down and got a little furnished apartment in Philly, and we'd been there about two weeks and they decided to transfer him to Fort Pierce, Florida. He was in charge of twenty-two sailors. So at two o'clock in the morning we get on that train, one of those old, I called it a cattle train because it was one of the old ones, you know, with twenty-two sailors. We had a full car.

Oh boy, it took all that night, all the next day, and all the next night before we got Fort Pierce. They would sidetrack us and let the fast trains go by, you know, and then we'd be there maybe a half hour or so and then get back and, oh, it was awful, it was awful. And I had a deck of cards with me and so my husband and I we played cards, and the others would say, well, if you're not playing cards after a while, can we borrow your deck? One deck of cards for twenty-two kids. There's nothing they didn't do on that train, nothing.

One time we were sidetracked, because I didn't know that, they were moving around, those kids are like eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. They'd gone to the liquor store, and we didn't know anything about that, and they bought a bottle of liquor, mixed it with oranges they had, and I guess they were passing it around. They had taken a bucket, an ice bucket from the dining car, and after a while the chef or whoever he was, somebody came and said, who's in charge, so my husband said, I am. He said, well, we've got that bucket missing so we want it back. So, we didn't know anything about it until then, you know, so my husband went around and he found it, you know, so I went and washed it and we returned that. I said, hey, you boys, you're going to get us in trouble, you know. And we had to watch, because we had all the papers for these kids. So, I mean this was, you know, a responsibility, a big one, we couldn't leave and just leave that. You can imagine if there was anything to pull out of there, they would have pulled it out, right? So it wasn't funny.

We got to Fort Pierce, there's a bus waiting for the twenty-two sailors and my husband, and my husband asked the bus driver where can I go, you know, meaning me. So he says, well right up the street there's a hotel there, and they'll let her have a room there. So then he said, close by there's a place to eat, too, you know, so my husband said, well, I have to go to the base, he says, I'll try and get off about three o'clock and meet you over there. So I go and I ask for a room. I could have the room from six o'clock, what it was in the morning, until noon, then I had to vacate it. Well, I was so thankful to be able to take a shower and sleep until noon. So when I, after that I went to eat and I waited for my husband.

Well, he came in, he says, we've got a room. The personnel manager on the base, renting this

big house, and he's got two rooms off the side and he's going to rent us a room with kitchen privileges for you alone. I have to eat out, at the base, you know. So I said, well, we have nothing, we have to do it, right? So we took that, and we stayed there the year. But that personnel manager didn't do bad. He rented the house for a hundred dollars a month, and he rented the two rooms at forty dollars a month each, so the house cost him twenty bucks a month.

AL: And so after that year did you come back to Maine?

HL: Came back home, yeah. My husband had a job, he was going to have a civil service job, they'd hired him, he was supposed to feed these, keep an eye on these Jamaicans that were taking care of the crops. And he had a gun because it wasn't that easy. By then my son was born, you know, my oldest son. I said, I don't want to go there, I'm scared, you know, I don't want to go there with my, so I came up here in October and my husband went back down there and he came back at Christmas and he said, no, that's not a life down there. He quit that and he came up here, and he started working for the Public Works. He did thirty-one years. He was a heavy equipment mechanic.

So I didn't work there for a while. I had my oldest boy, and then my other boy was born eighteen months later. So when they were, Harry, Paul was going to St. Peter's and Harry was turning four in January '51, so then I decided, well, I'm going to go back to work. Because my husband was making forty-four dollars a week, for four people, and pay rent. We lived in the one in the back, on the first floor. So I went back to high school that fall, before '51, and there were still my same teachers and they said, Helen, you don't have to worry about this. She gave me a book, my shorthand teacher, because shorthand was the thing then, with five thousand phrases. I learned that, and in January I went to apply for a job.

They said, well, there's job openings at the shoe shop office for thirty five dollars a week. For thirty-five dollars a week? And I have to pay for a sitter? After school, you know? That's not going to pay, I'm not going to have anything left. So they, I said, I want to get in the mill. At least they start you at forty, there's another five dollars. So, I used to go to the Bates Division, in the office, there was a big office there. And Arthur Ford was the office manager, and I used to, he said there were no openings. But once a week I'd go down, and he, you know, it's a big mill, eh, you've been down there, I'd see him coming from like across the street and he'd shake his head at me, meaning I don't have nothing for you.

So anyways, I went back to the employment office, and I knew this girl there because I was, the girl that I worked with at the finance company, while I was working there, they were good friends. She said, Helen, what kind of work do you want? So I told her. So she says, well, there's an opening at the executive office, Louis Laun's looking for a secretary, he wants someone who speaks French and English. I said, well, I've got ten years of French at St. Peter's. Yeah. So she says, let me call him. So she called him and he said, come on down. The employment office was on Lisbon Street then, just around the corner from Pine Street. So I went down, he dictated a letter and asked me to transcribe it on the typewriter, I did with no problem, and asked me a million questions and names of people that would give me references. Well, I had all the finance company people. I had worked with Sansoucy, Armand Sansoucy, Larry Raymond, and then the head cashier, so I had good references. So he went through all those references and all, because after all it was a confidential job down there, and I got hired.

So we had a car by then, but my husband took the car to work. I'd walk across the park to Pine Street, which was good. You have a sit down job, you've got to walk, you know. So I stayed there twenty-two years.

AL: And what was the sort of work that you did in the office?

HL: In the office? I was more, I was partly public relations of course, that was my boss's title, he was assistant to the president of public and labor relations, employee, public and labor relations. So a little bit was public, but the majority was really labor, because he dealt with the union. And, you know, we had

five contracts, five mills. So I had shorthand, I had passed 100 words a minute and I wanted more because he wanted me to sit in on meetings, so I went to night school at Mrs. Richard's. She lived on Grandview Avenue. She taught shorthand, and she used to dictate letters, you know, and, because she told me, don't bother with the letters, you know this, she says, just your speed, that's what you need.

So I did that, passed 120, I went back the following year, passed 140, went back the following year, passed 150, and the following year passed 175. And you have to have two witnesses when you're passing 175. I got it. But I was very lucky because there was a lady there, Anita Brown, and she was taking about 200 words a minute, so that's something to go up to. And that's how you pass it, you see? Didn't that work great? That was wonderful for me, because I could sit in on the union meetings, you know, and take the minutes.

And then we had arbitrations, you know, sometimes with the union, and I could prepare the briefs, all the exhibits and all that, and type union contracts, type five contracts for all the mills. I did more than that; one time I typed the police contract because my boss at the time was very friendly with the chief, and he used to come over to the office and he says, can you type this contract for me? Sure. I did.

AL: What role did the union play in the mills? Did it have a very strong presence?

HL: Oh yes, yes. What they did is, really the main thing was they boosted the labor rates, you know, I mean how much people made. But there was one thing, my mother belonged to the union, you know, because bosses played favorites sometimes, you know. On her job, certain warps, you know, that had to be done, we harder to take care of and didn't pay as much because it slowed the job down. And the favorites would get the good ones, and so my mother turned union. She says, I'm going to get my share of what's good, too, not just the crap. So it was good for stuff like that, you know?

AL: Do you recall any strikes while you were there?

HL: I went in, we were on strike when I went in, in January of 1951. So, my boss used to talk to Father Druin, he'd talk to the Jewish people, he'd talk to the ministers, to the, everybody, because he wanted to get to the people, you see? And that's how you get to the people. And the papers. I used to type, "for immediate release" and walk it over to the *Sun-Journal* practically every day.

AL: Was this Louis Laun?

HL: Louis Laun.

AL: What was he like?

HL: Oh, he was a wonderful guy. Very, very nice person, very fair and understanding, very understanding, too, yeah. I liked him. We worked well together.

AL: I know that especially in the earlier years the mill sponsored activities like sports teams and bowling.

HL: Oh yes, we did. Oh, we had bowling. I was a lousy bowler, but once a year I'd go kind of crazy and hit high single, (*unintelligible phrase*) high single twice. But I was a lousy bowler. And of course at the end we didn't have enough people to keep it, so we'd bring in, like my husband would get on the bowling team, you know, that way. But we, and then at the end of the year we had a banquet, we'd go out to Scarborough, to the big lanes there. It was fun because we were competing among the five plants then, you know. Yeah, we had a lot of things like that, activities.

AL: When you were on the bowling team did it give you a chance to meet others that you didn't normally work with?

HL: Yeah, oh yeah. I was on the bowling team even though I was lousy, but it was a fun thing to do, you know? But I was, you know, in contact with general office all the time, because whatever was going on at the executive office, some of it had to go to the general office and back, you know, so.

AL: And Hal Gosselin, can you talk about him? What was he like?

HL: He was fine. I got along fine with my bosses. I had no problem. He was good, too.

AL: And you mentioned Evelyn Wood earlier. Who was she and what did she do?

HL: Yeah, oh she was, she was head of the switchboard at Bates Division. All the calls would go in there. Now, if I was going to lunch I'd call Evelyn, I'm going to lunch, will you take my calls, I'll check back with you when I get back in an hour. And, you know, she had that pat down, everything. She was something else. And of course, that was how we'd go through New York, to the New York office, through, you know, everything went through her. She was a really outstanding person.

AL: Now, who was in the New York office, and what did that consist of? Was it just a (*unintelligible word*) office?

HL: It was sales, that's where the sales were. It was called Bates Fabrics over there, yeah, they controlled all the sales over there, yeah. And then once a month the directors would meet, well when the weather got nice they'd come and meet at the executive office here rather than New York, they'd fly in, you know. I'd set up, we had one empty office, great, we had these great big long tables, you know, I'd set up their lunch, call Grant's, bowl of potato salad, bowl of salad, and ordered everything, bring in the silverware, everything, set it all up like buffet style. And when they were ready they'd come up and bring their stuff and eat. And then they'd say, well, some of them would fly in from Virginia, Roanoke, Virginia, they had a, their special plane, some of the directors. So, they'd go, and then we had a chauffeur, too, you know, for them to go back and forth. And they'd want to bring back lobsters, so we'd call up and get that, and they'd pick that up on the way to the plane, you know. Get lobster feed when they get back to New York.

AL: And before we started recording you were talking about giving school tours at the mill. Can you talk about that?

HL: Yes, yes we did. Well, I didn't do that myself. It was under public relations, you know, there was under, at the end under public relations it was Bruce Huntington in charge, and Jan Lavenger, you know, and we'd have a schedule and they'd come in and they'd take them through Bates Division. It was nice. And then we'd set up a luncheon over there in, I forget if it was Number Five or Number Three. Anyway, we'd set it up, wherever it was more quiet and you could talk, because it couldn't be in the weave room, I'll tell you that right now. Oh, that was awful. I never got used to that noise.

But if it were real, real cold, see, we used to, they'd call my boss, Louis Laun, clubs in town having something going on, they'd ask for a freebie, you know. So either he'd give them a tablecloth with napkins, or sheets, so he say, go to the Bates store and pick up something, you know. So I'd go, but if it were real cold I'd go through the weave room. I made myself do it, I didn't want to go out, it was too cold. Because I was, you know, it's a long block when it's windy and cold. So I'd do that in the winter, but in the summer, oh, I loved to go outside then, it was good. Yeah, we'd give bedspreads, stuff like that, oh yeah. Lots of that stuff.

AL: Now you worked there for twenty-two years?

HL: Yeah.

AL: And did you retire after that, or -?

HL: No, no.

AL: What made you decide to leave?

HL: We had to, they told us to. Hal Gosselin had negotiated, by then we were down to Bates Division alone, all the other places were closed. So he had negotiated three contracts for Bates Division, and we were invited to go, the whole department. So Hal Gosselin and I, Bruce Huntington and Jan Lavenger, and Ed Coulton, who was in the personnel at Bates Division, the five of us, walked out, thank you very much. That was the last day of October 1972. So we went out to eat together, and then sayonara.

So, we didn't have a union in the office. I was given sixteen weeks separation pay, because I'd been there so long. And that was, sixteen weeks, that was November, December, January, February, right? So I said to my husband, gee, I guess I'm going to stay home this winter, I'm being paid. I'm going to have a vacation.

They had sold me my typewriter, my desk, a chair, my chair, and one file. So I said, gee, maybe I can find some typing to do for somebody. Well Jan Lavenger, her husband was VP at Diamond Machine. He called me, he says, we need, well I don't know if it was a thousand or what, all originals, we're looking to pick up some customers, and I want all original letters to go out to these people, with a copy naturally for him, you know. So that's what I did that winter, type all those letters.

And then in the spring, I thought, well, I got to start looking for something. I was offered a job, Vincent McKusick was the lawyer there, he wanted me to go to Portland and work for him. I didn't drive, I didn't have a car. How could I go to Portland? I thanked him, because I had worked with Vincent, I had, I used to look up a lot of arbitration cases for him when, you know, when he wanted to do something for Bates.

AL: He's a nice guy.

HL: And I loved that, oh, I loved that stuff. So I said, well I can't. Another one who called me was the, well, there's no point in saying, that didn't work, it was a job in Augusta and I didn't go either. I couldn't, didn't have a car, I couldn't drive. So Frank Geiger was VP of sales at Geiger Brothers. He had a cottage, and I have one, too, in Greene that was, my father built that cottage. So that's how he knew me, because we had a little association in the cove, we called it the (*name*) Cove Association. He was president, and I was secretary, so that's how he knew me. And he said, well why don't you come to work for me? I've got one secretary, but I could use another one.

Well, in the meantime, Pat Sullivan Crosby was getting out of her car at general office in the winter, that winter, fell and broke her elbow. So Irvine Miller, her boss, is treasurer, called me and he says, Helen, would you mind replacing Pat for a couple of weeks? You'll still get your check, because I was on that separation pay. I said, okay, so I went down there and I ended up working about six weeks instead of two weeks. So that took me into April, and I went to work for Geiger.

Well, the most boring job. Nice people, I mean perfect people. But the most boring job after I'd been doing everything under the sun. All I had to do was type some little form letters to the salesmen, you had your, your, oh, I forget, anyways, what you're aiming for is so much, and what you got, to just keep up the good work, you know?

AL: Not as challenging.

HL: So I was downtown on the street, and I met Pat Sullivan Crosby, and she says, how are things? And I says, oh, fine, I've got a good job but boring, you know, it's not challenging at all. And so she went

back and I guess she thought about it. She called me, she says, I've been offered a job at the post office and, she says, I'm not going there because I'm making more money here. She says, it's a clerk typist job, it starts at fifty five hundred a year. Well, that looked good to me, because all I was making is a hundred ten dollars a week at Geiger's. And you know at Bates, they didn't pay me either. It was a hundred a week there. So, you know who got (*brief blip in taping*).

I said to my husband, I haven't taken a test in about twenty-five years. And of course I didn't get out until five, so I said, why don't you go to the post office and ask for an application for me to take that test, the clerk typist test. So he did and I filled it out, and the test was at EL on a Saturday morning, so I went up. There were nineteen of us taking the test, and I got a 95 on it. So over there at the post office, they wanted someone who spoke French and English, too, because some people would call sometimes and didn't speak any English, you know.

So anyways, it got narrowed down to two people, and I had all kinds of references by then, too, to give them, you know. And he said, well, we've got it down, narrowed to two people, you and somebody else, and he says, we'll decide next week. So I called up, I says I'm going to show them that I'm interested in this job, you know, and that I want it. So they decided to give me the job. I was fifty-two, you know, I wasn't a chick. So they swore me in on a Friday, and my boss, I was working for Frank Geiger, he was in New York that week and when he came back I said, well, I've accepted a job at the post office. The pay is so much better, and I think the work will be more interesting for me, because this isn't challenging enough, you know. Oh, he offered me a raise, he wanted me to stay there. I said, no, I'm taking it. So I worked two weeks, and they were very nice, they gave me a send off and everything else. But it just, it wasn't, it just didn't challenge me at all, that job, you know? So I went to the post office.

We were, at first we were three, one, two, three secretaries. They were clerk stenos, the other two, I was clerk typist, because that was the job that was open, you know. The girl that had it before kept flunking, she couldn't pass the test. That's why she didn't get the job. So anyway, we were a postmaster, so one of the clerk stenos took care of the postmaster, the other one, she was filling in in between.

Well, one day, they had union trouble there, too, you know, one day the clerk stenos are out to lunch, and we were in the old post office at Auburn then, on Turner Street. The director says to me, he says, we need someone to take the minutes at the meeting, he said, do you want to do it? Sure. He says, you take shorthand? Sure. So I took that, I did the minutes. So, hey, they liked that. They said, we can, if you take the steno part of the test and you pass it, we'll promote you to clerk steno. Well of course, as long as I was clerk typist I could have been in the union if I wanted to. But I didn't want to do that, I wanted to go up the line, you know. So I said, sure. So they get this guy from Portland to come and dictate to me at 100 words a minute. And I had passed 175. So he talked, he talked, he talked, and when he stopped I just put down my pencil. He said, are you done? I said, yes. You got it? Yes. Well, I guess you know I got it. So I got promoted from a level five to a level nine clerk steno.

We had in Auburn at the time a hundred fifty five post offices under the management in Auburn. All the 042- and 043s post offices were under Auburn, as well as the 049 post offices. So we had all those, one hundred fifty five post offices. Well, after a while we moved from the old post to Rodman Road, to the new post office. It was nice there. And I was lucky. There was a girl that lived next door here, and she worked at Hannaford Brothers, they had their offices up the road from where, we'd go together, she'd drop me off at the post office. And at night, well my husband got out at four o'clock so he'd pick me up at five. So it worked out wonderful, you know, I'd give her five dollars a week for gas. At the time that was good pay, and she was tickled pink to do it, too. That's how I survived over there.

And after a while they decided to close the management sectional center, that's what we were. They still had an Auburn post office, but no. So some of us were excess then, you know, no job. So they had openings as postmasters, little postmaster jobs, you know, the district manager came and offered us these jobs if we wanted them, the ones that were excess. I wasn't interested in being a postmaster in the

boondocks someplace, where I didn't even have a car, you know. So I said, no, that doesn't help me any. So he said, well, you have to be distribution clerk, that's all that's left for openings. He says, you can be a distribution clerk in Lewiston, Portland or Augusta. I says, well, I'll take Lewiston, I can walk over to the post office, right? Well, it'll be night work. I said, that's okay.

Two weeks before I was going to be a distribution clerk, the district manager calls from Manchester and he says, we've got a job opening in Portland, secretary to the director of employee and labor relations. Right up my alley. I says, okay. So I went down for an interview. In the meantime, two other people were going down from Auburn to the Portland post office, they were being promoted there, too. So I says, I'll bum a ride and then I'll pay so much a week.

So I got hired, and I was lucky, my boss was just as nice as can be. Mr. Dumont, his name was. And I had met him before, because he was friendly with the director of the mail processing in Auburn and he'd come to Auburn, you know. So I went down there. I used to pay twenty dollars a week for their gas, whoever was driving, and we'd park right -

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B. I'm sorry, you were just finishing up the story about going to the post office in Portland.

HL: Yeah, so it was good. I mean, we'd get there about 7:30, I'd put in, I'd fix up the coffee for the people, because my boss had five departments under him. He had safety, which was next door, and then we were the two secretaries, and then there was my boss, and then her boss, you know, we were all together like, so we'd all chip in two dollars a month for the coffee. Well, I didn't drink coffee, but I'd drink about this much and then mid morning I'd get tea. They had machines, you know, they had tea. Because I was brought up on tea, I didn't care for coffee. But I'd fix it so everybody was happy when they came in.

And as I come in, I'd pick up the mail in the mail room downstairs, because we were on the second floor facing that park on, you know, it's beautiful down there on the second floor. And I'd sort out the mail and all that, have everything ready when they come in, the coffee was ready, the mail was in their slots. It was fun. And we did everything down there. Five departments under, you know, (*unintelligible word*) safety, and they didn't have any secretaries, but me.

AL: Before we end today I want to go back a little bit and ask if there's anything about your time in the mill, when you worked in the mill, that I didn't ask you that you feel is important to add, or any recollections or perspectives?

HL: No, actually I enjoyed my little stint that summer in the mill. It's just that I didn't want to do that for a living, you know. But when you're sixteen years old, you can do that sort of thing.

AL: And then as executive secretary for all those years.

HL: Yeah, and I was lucky. When I was in Portland they promoted me twice, I got two special achievement awards. And of course that brought up my pay, so my pay was way up there when I retired. But I only did ten years, actually, you know. But it gave me a little pension, pays for my rent.

AL: Thank you very much.

HL: You're very welcome.

End of Interview *little.int.wpd*