MILL WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE

Laurent Rivard **MWOH# 035**
(*Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu*) March 23, 2006

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History Project. The date is March 23rd, 2006, and I'm here at the Maison Marcotte with Laurent Rivard.

Laurent Rivard: Laurent, Larry.

AL: Larry, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by telling me your full name?

LR: Laurent, in French or English? Laurent Silvio Rivard.

AL: And what is your date of birth?

LR: 12/24/20

AL: Almost a Christmas baby.

LR: Eight minutes before Christmas. Cost my mother eight dollars.

AL: Now, were you born at a hospital or at home?

LR: At home.

AL: At home. And a doctor came to the home?

LR: Doctor came, he spent an evening with the family.

AL: And were you born in Lewiston?

LR: I was born in Lewiston. Little Canada, they call it. Know where that is?

AL: Yes.

LR: In front of St. Mary's Church.

AL: And did you grow up in that area?

LR: Well, when I was seven to fourteen years old, I went to a convent in Jackman, Maine. I spent there for seven years, and then I came over here and I graduate from Monmouth Academy. Then I went to high school for four years and didn't graduate.

AL: Now, what was your reason for going to the convent in Jackman?

LR: My father had quite a few kids, my father come from a (*name*), St. Anna in Canada, about four

hundred mile from here, and he had quite a few kids. Canada, you know, they had big family. And we was three down there in the convent, me and my brother and my sister were down there. But they only stayed one or two years, but I stayed there for seven years. But in the summer, we came home in the summer, and then we went back in September, when school start we go back.

AL: So how many brothers and sisters did you have in all?

LR: I had four brothers, and two sisters.

AL: So your parents, were they from Lewiston or, you said Canada?

LR: My father came from Canada, my mother come from Waterville, Maine.

AL: And what were their names?

LR: My father's name is (*name*) Philbert Rivard. My mother's name was Clara Lahey, her maiden name, Rivard.

AL: And did your mother, was she a homemaker or did she work outside the home?

LR: She never worked. My father came by, my father was running a train then, he was working on the railroad, he went by Waterville, he saw her next to the road, he waved. The second time, he stopped and he talked, and the third time he married her. (*Unintelligible phrase*). She never went to school. She doesn't even know how to write her name. So my father was pretty well educated. He had diplomas of anything. My father was a contractor, builder and architect. (*Unintelligible phrase*) and everything, he knew everything. And he built quite a few houses in Auburn and Lewiston.

AL: So, if you were born in 1920 then you were about ten years old when the Depression hit. Do you have memories of the Depression years? The Depression, Depression era, the 1930s?

LR: No, 1930s I was in Jackman. I come out of there in 1934, seven to '34.

AL: So you went to the mill after you finished high school, or did you do something in between?

LR: No, after I finish high school, I didn't graduate, but I got, I have my graduation over there. Because last year they make me a surprise, they talk between Lisbon and Lewiston High School, and they arrange me to have my diploma. Because I was there four years but never got, see, I went seven years to French school. When I came back, I didn't graduate on my senior school. My senior school I had to take sophomore English, junior English, and senior English. So instead of that, I went to work. I was about eighteen then, I went into the mill.

AL: Now, in the home, when you were at home, was it, did your parents both speak French in the home?

LR: Oh yes, oh yes, my mother couldn't even speak English almost. But my father was well educated. He could do anything.

AL: So when you went into the mill, which mill was it?

LR: All three of them. Androscoggin Mill for about fifteen, sixteen years, from 1938 to, then I went in the Army in between, two years and a half in the Army, then I came back and I had my job back in Androscoggin. They closed down, so I went, they sent me to a general office, I worked there for two

years and a half, general office. We'd experiment on yarn and all that stuff. And then they closed down, they sent me to Hill Mill on Canal Street. They closed down. Then they send me to Bates Mill. They closed down also. And then I went and worked for a shoe shop, cutting shoes. Outside cutter, they call it.

AL: What year did you leave the mills and go to the shoe shops?

LR: Let me see now, in '57 I quit general office, I (*unintelligible phrase*). Probably about, oh, 1940. No, in '57 I was at general office. Must have been 1958 I went to shoe shop.

AL: Okay, so you worked in the mills for about twenty years?

LR: Well, sixteen in one, and then a year and a half in one, then probably a year or so, so pretty close, pretty close.

AL: So can you talk to me about the different jobs you had? Go back to the beginning and what jobs, what the titles were, and describe those jobs for me?

LR: My job at first when I went in the mill, I was only eighteen years old, I was bobbin boy. They used to have boxes of bobbin, there, and I used to fill the (*unintelligible word*), what they call that, where the women working the winders, they need bobbin to fill up the bobbin, see. Well, there was different type color by, at the end of the bobbin, and I had to go around, when I see women that had no bobbin, I used to take my truck and fill a pan, what they call it, and then I had that for a while.

Then I says, I want to go further. Then they call me and they gave me another job to go for warp boy. Warp boy, that's where the women, they got a creel in back of their warper, and they got the spool, rayon, all that stuff. It all goes on one beam, there's probably about 800, 900 ends going on one beam, and they make a beam for the slasherman. I used to take out, when they were full, and put an empty one. And I had a little odd job in between, to pack the paper that I opened the cone, you got paper there around, you take the paper off, put that in a box, and before I leave I had to take some tape there and tape together a pile, and then I used to go home after that.

Then after a warp boy, I went to a slasher helper. The slashman was running the slasher, when he needed a helper to doff, doff means the same thing almost that warper, doff, they got probably eight, ten, fourteen reel, a loom, in the back there, it all goes to one loom. And that goes in the starch, and they got five cylinders about, oh, big cylinder to warp, to dry it up. Then they go in the front, and they go in the beam in the front. And these beam there, these warper, these beam, rather, they go downstairs for the weave room, and they use them to weave. We made all kind of, my wife used to make, when she was working on a warper she was making material for parachute, yeah.

AL: Was this during the war years? The 1940s, during WWII?

LR: That was, yeah, before, World War was 1941, '42, '43. Because I left in 1942 for the Army, two years and a half.

AL: So did you meet your wife at the mill?

LR: I was working, like I say, I was working as a warp boy, and she was working, she came in when I was working there. That's where I met her. I usually hang all around her machine. We been married for sixty years. But right now, I had a call from you or whatever, to talk to Cecile Rivard because she worked down the mill. I says, I'm sorry, Cecile Rivard is in a nursing home, d'Youville Pavilion, but I says, that's my wife. They asked me, that your wife? I says, yeah, that's my wife. Then we're going to see you then, and you'll talk to me.

AL: And you mentioned the hockey team, were you involved with that? The hockey team?

LR: Yes, I used to play hockey. Two years for Larry Charest, who was the coach. And two years in a row we went to play down at Madison Square Garden with the Metropolitan All Star, two years in a row.

AL: Wow, did you have, how was your hockey team? It sounds like it was pretty strong.

LR: We had a really good team. We lost the first time, first year, but the second year we beat them. And first year, they got wise. Me and my partner, I says, put your money in your pillow so your head be on it, okay? All the ones didn't do it, they were, come the morning, all the ones didn't have no money. All the ones, somebody go in, took their money. Well, we travel from Friday night, nine o'clock in the morning til we get to our room, and they're all tired so they all went to bed early. They had a lunch, walk around a little, then all went to bed in the afternoon, and that's where the guys or the women that works around there, you know, they had keys so they could go in. And every one of them had their money stolen. Of course they complain to the manager of the hotel, but he says, it's not my fault. But the manager gave them all a hundred dollars, just, you know, for what they lost. There's some guys, hockey players, they went down with their wife, they expect to shop. But they couldn't do much shopping.

AL: Were you around when the hockey team went to, wasn't it to Europe?

LR: They went to Europe. I left before, the year they went down there, I left the year before because I had two kids, I didn't want to get hurt. So they went down there, and when they're down there I says, they're going to have a hard time because it's a different type of playing than we, they play over here than over there. And they lost both game. I mean, they played about three, four game over there, against Russia and all that stuff, them European country over there. They didn't win too many game. I don't think they won any. When you get beaten eighteen to three, there, it's not funny. But the Russian want to kick the goalie, though, the Bates goalie, he had a chance to stay with the Russian. No, he said, I'm going home.

AL: Now, where did the hockey team practice?

LR: When they started?

AL: Where did they practice? Did you have a skating rink somewhere, an ice rink?

LR: We had an ice rink over here on Cloutier's Field, outside rink we had. And sometime we, I know we played a game one time, it was eight below zero outside. There wasn't, there was I think it was seven, spectators they call them? And when they skated off down in the little shack, house, little cabin or whatever there, and warm up. But it was cold. We played, we had good percentage, so. We probably play about, oh, once a week, and we went to Waterville a few times, we went to Auburn. We went around. We went to (*name*), New Hampshire. We beat them. And we had a good percentage, I think we lost three out of twelve game. But you only played it once a week, one game a week, and that was Sunday afternoon. But when it come March, the ice wasn't too good, so we had to play in January and February.

AL: Were you ever involved with the bowling league?

LR: No, we didn't have no bowling league then, no.

AL: That was probably in later years.

LR: Later years, yeah.

AL: And do you recall any strikes at the mills?

LR: Not in the mill, no. There was no strike. I got fired in the mill, though.

AL: Yeah?

LR: Yeah, I got fired. But not to my advantage, not my fault. We couldn't smoke where we worked, we had to go down on the fourth floor, a smoking room. Then my helper used to watch my machine. And when I went down there, I doffed, everything was ready to go, I went down and smoked, when I come up I had a smash in my, you know, when you got seven, eight, nine hundred ends coming up, and they all busted there. So I just, I only had about a hundred and fifty yards on the beam, so I took the knife and cut it off. And somebody squeal on me, that was working with me, he went up to see the boss, the overseer, whatever, and he come up to me, he says, stop, you're fired, that's it. But I didn't, in one week they call me back, because it wasn't my fault. And he told the boss, the overseer, that I, he told the boss on the third shift, he says, don't you do anything like that again without our permission. And don't take advantage of him. So, it went that way.

AL: What were the working conditions like?

LR: Pretty good. Oh yeah, pretty good. We start when the red light goes off, we had a red light, at eleven o'clock you had to change. The other guy leave and we take over. I come in one time, I come in late, oh, probably the light just come off. I lost four hours. They told me, well, he was allowed to stay four more hours and he had come back at three o'clock. So I went home, sleep it off til three, and I went back to work. For four hours, I lost four hour.

AL: So did you work the third shift?

LR: I used to work on third shift, sometime on the second shift. The third shift, they call that the graveyard. It's tough. It's not tough when you go in, not tough when you got out, but when you got about two, three o'clock in the morning, there, you doze off. But you got to keep going, you got to keep awake all the time.

And before the war there, in 1941, we had button with your picture on it, Androscoggin Mill. I had them just before I move over here, and I can't seem to find them. If I found them I would, I told the woman down there -

AL: Rachel?

LR: Funny name, last name there?

AL: Desgrosseilliers.

LR: Desgrosseilliers, yeah. I says, if I can find them I'll give them to you. She was glad, everything I gave her. A lot my boys gave, because I gave a lot to my boy, too, and he's turning it in over there. And they got my sweater from Bates over there, Bates Hockey. They got two stripe over there for years. They had a, some kind of a shindig last year, didn't they? Or the year before?

AL: Yes, the reunion.

LR: A reunion, yeah. And my sweater was still there, and the pictures I gave with the guys I worked with, and they took pictures of me in front of my machine. And before that, Bates sent a photograph to

take my life at home, they come up, took my life while I was eating breakfast, with my wife and one kid. They took my life when I was going to bed, they took pictures. And then they took pictures when I was working in the cellar on the machine, and they took pictures of me at hockey. They did quite a few pictures.

AL: That's wonderful.

LR: I gave them all to them.

AL: So what branch of the service were you in during WWII?

LR: Well, we went to Virginia, I had my basic training over there. Then I went to California, that's where we start another basic training, but with rifles and all that stuff. I was in the, rather, I was a, in a branch of a baker unit, quartermaster, baker unit, okay.

AL: Was this the Army?

LR: It's the Army, and we made bread for the whole battalion on there, and we made bread in the ground. We made all kinds of ways to, because you're out in the field, you don't get no oven, no anything. But when we went overseas, we had some four wheel oven, truck oven, know what I mean, oven in a -. After that, well, after California we went to, we cross Atlantic Ocean, we went to England. There, we was in a convoy, every fifty feet, a hundred yards, there's a ship here, ship there, ship everywhere. And we had the, let me see now, the one on my right was a WAC ship, you know, it's the WACS, WAVES, all women, women soldiers. And on my left was battleship Missouri, so we were pretty well situated.

And all around us, there was a, them ship there, they go fast and everything, they run away. We lost two ship, but we sank five submarine. Because every day we had the paper from the ship, the news, and they told us what happened, so and so. We land, twenty-three days it took to cross, and we land to England, and I stayed in England for seven months. I was a truck driver. And I travel all over the place. We went to commissary, took the food and bring it to the companies all around.

I was living in a private building.

(*Interrupted.*)

LR: After England we went to France. We landed at Omaha Beach, if you see on a movies or whatever or so, what, Omaha Beach was pretty rough. The D-Day they call it. But we went there after the D-Day, we were not a fighting unit, we were making food and bringing out stuff for the guys in the front. And after that, let me see now, we went in, it was, part France was gone, taken, and we landed in one place, we didn't know where we were. So the captain says, we're going to stop here. We stop there, and the women on the, that live in the houses all around there, they all ran away, ran away. I (*unintelligible word*) a kid, didn't know nothing. So I says to the kid, I talked to the kids, *mes amis, Americain, on est des Amer-*, I could speak French, naturally, I spoke to the kids and I told them, we're American, don't be afraid. Oh, the kid run in the house and told (*unintelligible phrase*). We had a good time, we was lost anyway, we didn't know where we were. Then they come out, in the afternoon they come out, they brought us some eggs. We cooked eggs and everything. It was (*unintelligible phrase*).

AL: So they were nice to you?

LR: Oh yeah, the French people? Oh yeah, because I talked to them. Oh yeah, after that we kept going, kept going. I got two battle star, I got the battle star of the European Theater Operation, and the

battle star of the big war, there, oh, I forgot. Anyway, and then we crossed the Rhine River one by one, they had pontoon for us to cross over. We had to cross one by one over the river on pontoon. That's further up. Then we went to (*name*), Germany and we stood there for about a year. The war was almost over then. And then all the big, high-ranking officer that got caught, they probably was about, oh, a block away from where I were. And after that we, you couldn't go near it anyway, MPs all around and there was, they were well protected.

Then I went to, Czechoslovakia is the furthest I went, (*name*), Czechoslovakia. When we got down there, we joined with the 97th Infantry. The 97th Infantry, we got orders we're going home, hey, hey. I go from (*name*), Czechoslovakia, to Germany and France, way up to Marseilles, France. Then we took the boat, and we cross in seven days. When I got in the United States, (*unintelligible phrase*), I had enough. They had a big steak (*unintelligible word*) for dinner, we had a great meal when we come in. I remember that.

I was corporal. Three, four times I got busted, but not on my fault. One of them was a guy in my truck in Germany, I had a helmet, German, on my head, you know, on my head. And who do I see going by was my captain. All our trucks, on a corner bumper, about six inches were white. In the front and in the back. So they knew, we knew all our trucks, where they were, and we'd see them coming. But me, when he saw me he said, you know, you're going to get killed. Wearing a German hat over there, while driving the truck.

Then one time, an airplane land right next to the road. He got out, he's coming out, coming at us. I didn't want, I (*unintelligible phrase*), I got out. But I had a rifle and six bazooka in my truck, so I was well, and beside my gun, my rifle. I had a, and I went to the front three or four times. But as I was going, flash here, flash there, the MPs tell me, you ain't going, I said I got to deliver, they said you ain't going nowheres, that's the front line over there. So I turn around, all turn around.

A lot of things that went by that I don't remember, you know. But I got strafed four time. I had, one day I had, well I used to say nine flat tires, because I had bullets in the, shrapnel in the tire, but maybe it's out of my mind now, I can't seem to remember when. But my boys got a notebook, the notebook, every day I was doing, writing down what I was doing. Then they would ask me, like they say, how about, I was twenty nine in '43, (*unintelligible phrase*) my wife's birthday. I was in France, doing a lot of thing in France.

AL: And you were glad to come home.

LR: Well, yeah, in one way, yeah. Well, I didn't mind the Army, though, so much. But a lot of time a job, works I didn't like. When I got busted a few time, there, they send me in the bakery. In the bakery you work twelve hours, from twelve to twelve. Sometime you work from twelve afternoon to twelve at night, sometimes twelve midnight to twelve in the afternoon, it's twelve hours. We operate for six month in a row without stopping, making bread. We made about forty eight thousand pound of bread a day. That's a lot of bread.

AL: And you said in 1958 you went to the shoe shop.

LR: Nineteen fifty eight, I went, yeah, after -

AL: Into the shoe shops?

LR: After I went to the three mills I work with. I learned to cut shoes over there.

AL: How as the shoe shop different from the mill in terms of the atmosphere and the people you

worked with?

LR: Well, shoe shop is piecework, you know. You're at your work, the more you do, the more you get paid. It all depend how you get paid. You don't get paid by the hour like a mill. You don't get five cents a raise either, like the mill. Then at one time we had five cents raise. That's a lot of money, five cent, then, in 19-, let's see, yeah, 1940 or '41, somewhere around there. Hey, big raise, five cents. But the shoe shop, like I say, I was cutting the outside shoe, I cut women's shoes, and I cut a lot of them. And you had so much to do, if you do it, you get paid for what you're doing. You don't get paid by the hour.

AL: Was there a difference in how people socialized with each other between the shoe shop and the mill?

LR: No, no, no, no.

AL: Were there any strikes when you were at the shoe shop?

LR: Yes, shoe shop, we, one morning, we didn't like what was going on, all the cutters walk out. That's almost like a strike. And we went outside, and we didn't, then they start talking, they says, well half, one side go in and work. But the other half we didn't, and I was on a, I was just, I was new to the shoe shop then, three or four months, so I stuck with my side. But they got fired, I got fired, too. In the morning next day the overseer, he come up my house, he says I want you to go back to work. He knew I was quite a good worker. And I work there for twenty two years. One time I even work on Sunday morning. I used to work every Saturday, overtime, time and a half, Sunday of double time. So over there I made a little money. Better than the mill.

AL: Was the union strong in the shoe shops? The union, was there a union in the shoe shop?

LR: Oh yeah, there's a union in the shop. There's a meeting every month, union meeting. So anything that goes wrong, they used to tell us, tell the people there, go to the meeting. What's going on, what's going to be.

AL: Do you remember the names of the shoe shops that were around then?

LR: Yeah, one was, twenty two years at Shapiro, and then the other one, the one on Bates, the Hill Mill was a shoe shop that went in there, that was Songo shoe shop.

AL: Songo?

LR: Songo, yeah. And after that I went to Oxford Street, when Shapiro closed down I went to Oxford Street, there was a new shoe shop there, too, I worked there for six years. I don't, I can't remember the name now.

AL: Was there a shoe shop called Knapp?

LR: Knapp Shoe? Yeah, my buddy that used to go hunting and fishing with me, he used to work down at Knapp Shoe.

AL: And where was that located?

LR: On Main Street there, up above, in the middle, well, if you know where the, it's all gone now, Strand Theater was on there first, you know where the Strand Theater was? Well, in the back there, about, a road, what's it called.

AL: Like an alley?

LR: No, there's a road there, but, they call that (*unintelligible phrase*) to the road, what they call that, the -

AL: Yeah, you mean a road between buildings?

LR: Just a street, there was a street there. One block, a block further than the Strand Theater. He works over there, my buddy.

AL: Were there any people that you worked with in the mills that you remember, that stick out in your mind, that maybe I can't interview, that you could talk about?

LR: I don't know. Quite a few have passed away now.

AL: Yeah, that's why, if you remember some of them.

LR: No, I never met any yet. For a long time I never met any. But only, like I said, a guy that I used to work with down at Shapiro, he moved to Knapp Shoe, right here. We used to go hunting and fishing. He lives in Auburn, Lang Road in Auburn. But right now, he's had a heart attack there, he went to hospital for a while, now he's home. His son's taking care of him.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to add to this interview today?

LR: Well, I'm a hunter and a fisher, fisherman. I go hunting the first day it open, season open. My boss used to tell me, if you go, don't come back to work. I went hunting, never mind work. When I come back, he'd come up and ask me, did you see anything? Then I'd tell him the story. Then I'd go fishing everywhere in Maine, up to two hundred fifty mile from here I went fishing.

AL: What do you like to fish for?

LR: I'm a tauge fisherman, lake trout. But when you fish lake trout, you might catch a salmon, you never know. But lake trout is down the bottom. And the biggest one I caught was, well, sixteen pound I guess. I've caught quite a few down at Sebago, there's nice fish over there, too. Nine, ten, eleven pound. But when it come to September, Labor Day, September, I used to go out, up north. My wife stayed home with the kids, I'd go up north. Yeah, that's my life, I liked fishing.

And when she went home, when she went with her parent to Rhode Island, that's where her mother came from, Rhode Island, she went to Rhode Island on her parent, her mother's side, but I never went. She went with her parent. And we had a good life. Right now she's down there, in d'Youville. Can't walk any more.

AL: Thank you very much.

End of Interview
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