

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

Lise Smith
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

MWOH# 027
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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History project. The date is March 2nd, 2006, and today I'm interviewing Lise Smith at her home in Lafayette Park in Lewiston, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by giving me your full name?

Lise Smith: My name is Lise Smith.

AL: And is your maiden name Smith?

LS: No, my maiden name is Hill.

AL: And where and when were you born?

LS: I was born in (*name*) in Province of Quebec.

AL: And your date of birth?

LS: March 31st, 1943.

AL: And when did you come to Lewiston? Well, to Maine?

LS: In 1968.

AL: So after you had grown up, so you grew up in Canada?

LS: Yes, I got married and my husband, his father was from Maine, and he wanted to come and meet his father's family, but we moved here.

AL: So what was it like growing up in Canada?

LS: Well, it was good at the time, you know, with the whole family. That's what I miss the most right now.

AL: You had a lot of family?

LS: Because my brother and sister, they're all over there. I'm here with my children (*unintelligible word*).

AL: What was it like, how was Canada different than Maine?

LS: I didn't think it was that different. The only thing is, you know, I was surprised when I come here to find how many people speak French. And when we moved here, the people we rent the apartment was speaking French and, you know, and we met other people then. When I work in the mill I, most of the people I work with speak French. And I love that.

AL: So you met your husband in Canada?

LS: Yes.

AL: Was he from Canada, or?

LS: Yes, he was from Canada, but his father was from Philips, Maine.

AL: So you moved here in 1968?

LS: We moved in '68.

AL: Was that in part because your husband had a job here, or?

LS: Yeah, he moved here in '67 and he found a job, an apartment, then me and the kids moved here.

AL: And what year did you start working at Libbey Mill?

LS: In '7-, I think it was in '75. Yeah, I think it was in '75. First I work on, to learn to run the machine, I was working in a winder. I worked day for a while, then go and work on the third shift. Then I move from the fifth floor to the fourth floor, working on the winder and the twister, and that was, I love, I love working, I still miss working the machine.

AL: You do? What did the winders and the twisters do?

LS: The winder, that we take the yarn that they take off the bobbin, the yarn they take off from the spinning machine, and we make cone, with the cone of the yarn, then for the winder they wanted two different thread color together on the winder. We was doing that, we put the pattern they gave us, like they wanted red and white we put cone of red and a cone of the white, then we fill to the machine and the machine would twist it together. Then we send those, after the, we send those to, there was, on bobbins, we send those to the, the twister was twisting the thread together. Then we were sending those to the winder, the winder put it on the cone to send like to the stitching room where they was doing the blankets and all that, and send those cone to the, we have a non-weaving department, they was making curtains and making glove linings and making the drape for the, those that you (*unintelligible word*).

AL: Right, oh, neat. So you did that for eleven years?

LS: Eleven years.

AL: So until like 1986?

LS: Yes, '88, yeah, 1988.

AL: And did you leave because the work wasn't there any more, or did you have something else you wanted to do?

LS: I was laid off, and by getting laid off I then looked for a job, then I found a job at the pharmacy working on the floor, (*unintelligible phrase*), and I took the job over there. Then at that time Libbey was talking about selling. That was, I thought that was a good move that I did.

AL: Were there people you worked with that you remember from the days at the mill?

LS: Oh yeah.

AL: I mean people you could describe and talk about?

LS: People, there was, I remember there was other, older people that worked there for over twenty years, and that was surprising to see, all, how much work those people, you know, they knew that

machine, they knew what they was doing, and that was amazing. And if you need any help with something, you go and ask them, they will come to you and they will show you, sometimes they will show you, that was so much easier to get back to your work and all that by the way they teach you to do.

AL: And a lot of them spoke French.

LS: Yes.

AL: And that must have made it more like home for you.

LS: It was good, you know, because there was, because I learn English in the mill and, because didn't want to speak English with my kids, I didn't want them to take my pronunciation, I knew my pronunciation would not be good. In fact, what I did, I always spoke French with my kids, and I had them speak French back to me. And in the mill, you know, that was easier for me, for them to explain to me in French because if I needed to ask a question in English, looked like I have to say maybe ten words and in French two words.

AL: So you started speaking English when you were working in the mill.

LS: Yes, I learn, I work with people who did not speak French at all, and the lady that teach me to, English, that was a German woman, when I start working with her. I ask her, I said, do you speak French? She turned around, she said, do you speak German? And I said, oh my God, I ask the wrong question. But she came to me and told me that if I needed to know something, I will have to tell her in English what I wanted. Even if she knew what I wanted, she will not say nothing to me until I explain to her what I want, even if it take a long time. And she's the one that help me to learn English.

AL: That's a neat story. So your children are bilingual.

LS: Yes. I'm just sorry that I didn't teach my grandson French.

AL: And how old is he?

LS: My grandson? One will be turning eighteen next month, next week, and this one will turning seventeen in April. My kids, when they were small, they was telling me, oh, I don't like French, I don't want to learn to speak French. But when they start working, they find out that their French was good for them.

AL: And who was heading the Libbey Mill, was it Bates was overseeing the Libbey Mill at the time you were there?

LS: No, that was Mr. Libbey, Mr. John Libbey was the, I was hired by him. And he was nice. If you was having problem with something, you just go, and he wanted you to call him John. We just go to see John and said, John, I got laid off and can I go work somewhere, you know, find work on another floor. And if he have an opening on another floor, they will move you, and when your job reopen, something, or the job pick up, they go back to your work. I still see some people I work with, and we talk a lot about the mill and what we used to do, and how much fun sometimes we, you know, all together sit down at break times. And sometimes the boss have to say, "Eh, break is over girls."

AL: So you got along well with your coworkers?

LS: Most of the time, yes. I didn't have any problem.

AL: Did they have social, I know the Bates Mill had activities like bowling and things like that. Did the Libbey Mill have anything (*unintelligible word*)?

LS: Some people was going, but I have the kids, the kids were small at the time. But I work, came

home, take care of the kids, and.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about in terms of the Libbey Mill and your work that you think, that sticks out in your memory or you think is important to add?

LS: I don't know if you went to, when you went to Bates if you saw the two small machine over there, they come from Libbey?

AL: Oh, are those looms that you brought in?

LS: Yes, I made those.

AL: Oh, yeah.

LS: Those was the machine I work on.

AL: Oh yes, they're like this.

LS: Yeah, on the wood, in the showcase, in the plastic showcase?

AL: Yes, those are incredible.

LS: And I know, when I went from the picture and I look at those now, I have arthritis and all that, and I look at those and I said, how wouldn't be able to do those any more.

AL: But those are incredible to have, for the museum.

LS: But I, you no, at that time I just, I got laid off and I went to see my boss at the time, and I said, can I get photocopy of the machine, and that's what he gave me, a photocopy of the inside of the gears and inside of, and I get home, I took cardboard, first I made cardboard display and make sure that I was not cutting for nothing, you know, I didn't want it, but it wasn't long hours to do, but I was, I had a good time.

AL: The detail was amazing.

LS: I always love to work on wood, so I made those. The knife over there, and for the kids I always made them toys, (*unintelligible word*), because when we move here I did not work the first five years, because the kids was all small then. When they start school, then I start working.

AL: And so you made these replicas of the looms. And did you keep them here for years, or did they go to the mill?

LS: For years they was in the mill, in the office where, for the people, the people that was going and visit or, they could see. And where I was working, they opened in Lewiston, what used to be the Hillcrest, they opened a department over there and I went there. And one of the person, one in charge, and she talked to me and she said, you know, they're talking about closing (*unintelligible word*). And she told me that one of the manager over there was leaving, because there was somebody else come, and she said she heard that he was, when he leave he wanted to bring the machine with him. And I said, I put too much time on that. I went back and I got the machine, and when I move here I didn't have enough space, but it was in the cellar for a while.

And my daughter, she was I think on the, reading the news on the computer, and she told me, she said, she called me, she said, you know Bates Mill are doing a museum. She said, you wanted to find a place for your machine, she said, it'd be great. And she call, and the same day my daughter came and get me and we get the machine and we went over there, you know, show it, if you're interested. I was thinking about maybe bringing them to Augusta where they have, they have a museum over there? And when I heard that Bates was opening, I said, it's right here downtown, I like better, have something

where -

AL: The local history.

LS: Exact. Because when I start working at the mill, most of the people was working, work at Bates and work at Libbey. Because when they used to, the women could not work more than forty hours, and they used to work so many hours in one mill, then go to work so many hours at Bates, so many hours at Libbey, and that way. It's very interesting.

AL: Great. Thank you very much.

LS: You're welcome.

End of Interview
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