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Labor study of the Franco-American  
community of Waterville, Maine from  
1890 to 1940

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A LABOR STUDY OF THE FRANCO-AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY OF WATERVILLE, MAINE FROM  
1890 TO 1940

BY

Margaret Bernier

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
of the Senior Scholars Program

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1981

This paper is dedicated  
to Felexine Bolduc Bernier  
her daughter Fernande,  
and her son Albert.

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## Abstract

The Franco-American community of Waterville, Maine has been largely ignored until very recently. This, of course, was partially due to the fact that they were not predominant in the upper echelons of local politics, business, and industry before the 1950's because of discrimination and economic insecurity. Within their own ethnic community there were a remarkable number of leaders in privately owned, small, ethnic businesses and in the professions. These men provided the Franco-Americans with symbols of success that contributed to their ethnic pride. The few studies and accounts on the French of Waterville, most notably one compiled by Albert Fecteau in 1951, focused upon these successful Franco-American businessmen and professionals and their contributions to the community.

The purpose of this study is not to undermine the importance of these successful men, but it is an attempt to account for the notable achievements of the working class Franco-Americans who contributed their labor, their votes, and their efforts to improve working conditions through striking even in the face of discrimination and financial insecurity. This group has been ignored in almost all the written accounts of Waterville, and this error must be rectified. The Franco-Americans-- laborers, businessmen, and professionals, all contributed to the character and to the prosperity of Waterville.

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## INTRODUCTION

The traditional view held about the Franco-Americans, who for the most part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were blue collar workers, is one of a docile, hard working group who "lacked" the desire to improve their careers and their financial and social status. The "blame" for their status of blue collar workers, for the absence of French men in the upper stratus of local industries, and for their "reluctance" to assume Yankee roles in politics etc., has been placed on their supposed "inherent traits" such as their docile nature, their lack of interest in the education of their children, and their low self-esteem that forced them to accept the menial positions offered by the textile industry, the railroads, and other mills. This view is absolutely wrong.

The Franco-Americans of Waterville contributed their energies to the labor pool of Waterville. In the period from 1890 to 1940, this group was forced to adapt to a new country, its government and culture. From 1890 to 1920, the French immigrants sought the employment of the local industries such as the Lockwood Cotton Mill, accepting menial positions, because they needed the money to survive in their adopted country. The cultural barriers caused by their ignorance of English and by the prejudice of the English Protestant Community of Waterville forced them to rely upon the more menial forms of labor. Since they migrated from the farms, fisheries, and lumber camps of Canada, their lack of industrial and management skills forced them to start from the bottom of the employment ladder.

From 1920 to 1940, the Franco-Americans were confronted not only by cultural, discriminatory and financial barriers, but they were forced to face the

consequences of the North Eastern textile depression of the 1920's and 1930's and the national depression of the 1930's. During this period, wages were cut, hours extended, shifts were laid off, and unemployment rose. Many of their menial positions were eliminated in the local industries, and as a result, the Franco-Americans became increasingly financially insecure.

However, the Franco-American labor force adapted in the face of cultural, discriminatory and economic barriers. They adapted to the lack of jobs by moving between industries, occupations and small businesses. They did not let their ambitions become stifled by the discrimination against them in the promotional policies of the local industries. Instead they moved into private-ethnically owned enterprises and into the professionals. Within the employment structure of Waterville's industries, they formed the bulk of the strikers who walked out on their jobs and picketed for the right for labor to organize and for better wages and conditions. As a labor force, they did not docilely accept a lower, working class status, but changed from a solidly blue collar labor force to a more diverse professional, business and labor group.

This study concentrates on the employees of the Lockwood Cotton Mill, the C. F. Hathaway Co., and the Maine Central Railroad. Although business, historical and newspaper accounts depict the enormous effect these industries had upon the city economically, the number of spindels and of looms, the size of the payroll, the number of new businesses portray just numbers and size. The Franco-Americans, through the use of interviews, expressed not only number and size but their reasons for accepting a certain job and their attitude toward and their recollections of their working life.

Although the Lockwood factory has been closed for more than twenty-five years, it is still remembered by local residents as the place where they, their

ancestors, or their generation of relatives had worked. Still standing today, the #1 mill is empty, dilapidated and marred by broken windows. It stands as a reminder of the old way of life on the "Plains", the French section of Waterville. The #2 mill houses the expanded C. F. Hathaway Co. It stands as a reminder of the city's and its resident's potential to adapt to change.

Since the company records were not made available and since there are no written accounts of Waterville's factory life, the information for this paper has been compiled not only from usual sources such as newspapers but from oral accounts of local Franco-Americans. Relying upon oral history has its hazards since these accounts of past experiences have been presented from the perspective of the present. Another problem is that these accounts are representative of a group who were willing to be interviewed and therefore may have had a more "successful" experience on their jobs or may have excluded information which they prefer to forget. The interviews that have been compiled do have various themes throughout them, that in conjunction with written material, provide a reasonably accurate picture of these industries and their employees' lives.

Tamara Harenen who used oral histories in compiling the book, Amoskeag, calls this oral-historical tradition, generational memory. Her definition of oral history is that it "is not strictly a means of retrieval of information, but rather one involving the 'generation' of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Secondly "oral history. . .provides insight into how people think about certain events and what they perceive their own role to have been in the historical process."<sup>2</sup> During the interviews, it was difficult to convince many of the retired workers that their roles in industry was of great importance to the growth of the community and more precisely, the history of Waterville. This difficulty also confronted Tamara Harenen and Barbara Myerhoff in their respective works. Most workers felt that textile work was looked down upon, even though it required long hard

hours of labor. My interest in conditions, wages, hours and relations among employees and the bosses, were often met by surprise and dubious looks. However, as the interviews progressed, the industrial life of Waterville came alive with people instead of merely with a large number of machines.

## PART I

### FRENCH MIGRATION TO WATERVILLE AND SETTLEMENT OF THE "PLAINS"

The massive migrations to the limited states that occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been considered the major catalysts in the formation of the industrial character of the nation. The internal migration of the French Canadians, a mere facet in this complex wave of immigrants, has received little or no attention from historians or sociologists. Usually written off as a 'quiet presence', a 'docile' group of laborers, or a being inconsequential, recent historians including Tamara Harenen, John Modell, and Dyke Hendrickson have stressed the importance of the French-Canadian influx to the growth of various industrial areas. These historians maintain that the French-Canadian migration changed the character of these towns, the make up of their labor force and their culture.

By 1860, the textile industry in New England favored the French . . . They established churches, parochial schools, societies and clubs. The new<sup>1</sup> residents spoke French as if they were in Quebec.

The pattern of migration from lower Canada to the industrial town of Waterville, Maine, from 1860 to 1910 is the aspect of the French-Canadian immigrant movement that most concerns this paper.

A migratory movement that must be included is the Acadian Migration. Acadia, the Maritime and Atlantic provinces of Canada, also contained part of New England or more precisely Maine. In the early 1700's the Acadians, a French speaking group, were expelled from their territory after the conquest of Acadia by the English. Throughout the century they were forced to settle in other New England localities and Louisiana. Many of them returned to New England communities such as Waterville in the 19th century because they considered it a better place to live.

The earliest French-Canadian immigrants into the state of Maine were seasonal workers or temporary laborers from lower Canada, usually from the county called "La Beauce". Prior to the construction of the textile mills in Biddeford, Lewiston and Waterville, these "temporary" immigrants were employed in the fisheries, lumber camps, saw mills, small farms and orchards, or on odd jobs. It was quite common for French-Canadian men to migrate to Maine just for the winter in order to work in the woods or on the great log drives. There are also numerous tales about "adventurers" who took whatever employment they could find upon a temporary basis, often stopping at a different abode to sleep each night.<sup>2</sup>

During the early years of the nineteenth century the French-Canadian immigration into Maine was quite minor. Throughout these periods, prior to the building of the Lockwood Cotton Mill in 1974, the economic situation that forced most French-Canadians to search for employment elsewhere became acute. Very much like the peasants of Europe who migrated to the United States, the French-Canadians were largely farmers who solely depended upon the self-sufficient subsistence farms for their livelihood. Their parishes that consisted of small farms, a small store or two and most prominently, a Catholic Church, was a WHOLE that bound them through ties of blood, of labor, of culture, and of religion. The difficulty with which they cleared the land in the huge Canadian forests and then attempted to feed, to cloth and to house their large families shows a people of remarkable endurance and ability. The problems of weather and the land, the rise of new agricultural methods that they could not compete with, and economic needs made many of these farms outmoded and financially insolvent.

As in traditional European villages, the French-Canadian farmers were immersed in the problems of overpopulation and inheritance. Since the farm went

to one son, the younger siblings were required to search for employment elsewhere or to clear more of the rocky Canadian Soil. Accompanying this tradition, the mass production of such articles as cotton clothe, depleted the ability of the farmer to bargain with the local store owner for the few necessities the family needed to purchase. Since the store owner no longer needed the farmers' flax, surplus of apples, wheat or other products, the farmer had no recourse for purchasing various commodities; many of which would improve their farms. The final and most important trend was the increasing dominance of massive farms that used modern agricultural methods to produce more food at a lower cost. Economically speaking, these trends spelt disaster for the subsistence farmer. Having little or no surplus to compete in the market, the farmer became easy prey for the ills of weather or of financial losses. These conditions forced many French-Canadians to search for new employment in Canada and in the limited states.

This migratory movement kept a slow but steady pace during the early eighteenth hundreds. Most of the immigrants who came to Waterville either walked to Canada, sometimes "without even knowing the path,"<sup>3</sup> or came by horse and buggy, or even by raft<sup>4</sup> down the Kennebec River. Albert Fecteau states that the movement was "accelerated, however by the building of the Kennebec Road"<sup>5</sup> which was completed in 1830. This road, originally an Indian path, was built after the Maine Legislature passed a resolution for its construction on February 12, 1827.<sup>6</sup> As a result of its construction, the populations of Lewiston and Waterville showed an increase in French residents. After the road was completed in 1830, approximately 300 families migrated to Waterville from Canada and settled upon the flat land in the southern end of Waterville, later known as the "Plains."<sup>7</sup>

Another catalyst for the migration was the American Civil War that brought approximately 36,000 to 50,000 French enlistees into the United States army.\* Jacques Ducharme in his book The Shadow of the Trees recounts this movement, but points out that many of these immigrants were tricked into joining the union ranks. Agents went up to Canada to recruit soldiers. Offering up to fifty dollars in pay, above and beyond future pay, these agents attained French-Canadian signatures\* on contracts written in English for "jobs" in the United States. The French-Canadians soon discovered that they had been enlisted in the ranks of the army, and that there was no way out except desertion. Many French-Canadian men realized what the "job" entailed, but financial need necessitated their enlisting. The French-Canadian participation in the Civil War is documented even for Waterville. General Isaac Bang's Military History of Waterville, Maine lists fifty-five French-Canadians from Waterville who served in the War of Rebellion.<sup>8</sup>

The most influential force behind this massive migration was the acceleration of the industrialization of the North Eastern United States after the Civil War. Whether we are dealing with the Amoskeag, the largest textile plant in the nation, built in Manchester, New Hampshire, or with the Lockwood Company which began its operation in 1874 in Waterville, the need to tap new labor sources became an acute problem for these textile concerns. Prior to the 1870's Waterville, a relatively small, rural town situated on the Kennebec River, had relied economically upon farming, some fishing, lumbering and small mills such as the Wing brothers' saw and grist mills built before 1800 and Deacon Daniel Well's carding and clothing mill which became a shingle mill in 1832.<sup>9</sup> The list of such small enterprises could go on, but these relatively obscure operations

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\* Albert Fecteau indicates 36,000 French soldiers, various other sources have indicated as many as 50,000.

\* The signatures often consisted of an X.

had little impact upon the industrialization of the town and the need for a larger labor supply.

The early textile mills in New England relied upon local farm girls as employees. In communities such as Lowell, Massachusetts, it was considered respectable, even desirable for young farm girls to work in local mills prior to marriage.<sup>10</sup> Not until the immigration of the Irish in the 1830's, 1840's and 1850's did the labor force change in these textile towns. With the arrival of the Irish into Boston and other ports, textile factories and other industries had the "cheap labor" they needed to man and to expand their industries. During the nineteenth century, the employment of the Irish in mills in Woonsocket, Rhode Island; Manchester, New Hampshire; and Lowell, Massachusetts to cite a few, was a common phenomena. The members of this first wave of immigrants opened the doors to other movements that would follow from Lower Canada and Europe and that would in many instances displace the Irish laborers.

As immigrants from Europe and Canada quickly assumed the roles of laborers in these industrial towns, it has been noted by authors such as Hare~~ven~~<sup>ven</sup>, Duch~~ane~~<sup>ane</sup> and so forth that the French-Canadians were soon known as ideal workers and were recruited systematically.<sup>11</sup> The textile industries dependence upon the French-Canadians, male and female, as a labor force became well known to historians and different immigrant groups, especially the Irish.

With the breakdown of the subsistence farms of Canada, with the financial needs of French-Canadian families, etc., the opportunity to work at a menial position in a textile firm was tempting to many, financially necessary for most. Most were recruited by word of mouth; a small portion, by advertisements.<sup>12</sup> Some came to settle permanently in the United States, but

not all thought in this way, but remembered instead the farm in Quebec. They would one day return so they thought, to clear the last debt, and they

could live in peace. But those that did return went alone, for it was rare for the children to want to follow.<sup>13</sup>

Many French-Canadians who came prior to 1910 remained in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Once in the United States the pattern of migration if any at all was "interstate migration", most commonly between textile towns.

The French-Canadian migration into Maine and more precisely into Waterville was somewhat different. Unlike New England's other textile towns, the French migration to Waterville was not preceded by another large "foreign" element, the Irish. Industries such as the C. F. Hathaway Company hired local farms girls to work in their operations.<sup>15</sup> From a list of employee names compiled around 1890, there is only one Irish name listed; all the others are English names.\* With the completion of the Lockwood #1 mill in 1874, the French-Canadians were recruited almost immediately from Lower Canada. Whether they were following the precedent set by the recruiting agents of, for example, the Amosbeag, the "bosses from the Lockwood would go get them (the French-Canadians) by the car load."<sup>16</sup> Many from "La Beauce" and other areas of Quebec heard of the opportunities through contact with French-Canadians who had already immigrated and who were returning to bring their families with them to Waterville. The accessibility of the job, the need for wages even if they were low, and their reputations as hard workers made the opportunities at Lockwood Company reason enough to move to Maine.

Most of the Franco-Americans who were interviewed gave the details of various members of their families' migration to Waterville on foot, wagon, or raft in search of employment. This movement brought some 35,000 French-Canadians to Maine by 1910.<sup>17</sup> In 1870, the population of Waterville four years before the completion of the Lockwood was 4,852. By 1911, the population had more than

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\* The Irish name was Molly O'Donnell. The list is from the Hathaway records.

doubled to 11,844.<sup>18</sup> Of the Franco-Americans interviewed, almost all of them mentioned that a relative of theirs, usually their parents, aunts and uncles sought employment at the Lockwood during the period from 1874 to 1920. This population change brought about with the employment opportunities of the Lockwood Company and the employment needs of the French-Canadians permanently changed the character of Waterville.

When the immigrants arrived around the turn of the century, they found the small, rural but prosperous town of Waterville. Ideally located on the Kennebec River, which supplied much of its electrical power for industries. Waterville had well established professional, industrial and mercantile groups. Robert Cloutier in his unpublished masters thesis on Waterville's industrial development from its earliest days as a community up to 1900 states,

in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Waterville experienced, as did many other communities in Maine and the nation, the impact of modern industrialization. These decades witnessed steady growth in Waterville's industrial establishment. The coming of the Lockwood Company, the Maine Central Railroad, and the Hollingsworth and Whitney Company in Winslow guaranteed Waterville its place as one of Maine's leading industrial centers.<sup>19</sup>

The Portland Board of Trade Journal of 1890 states that Waterville had the necessary ingredients for success such as an electric plant, horse railroad facilities, and educational advantage. It goes on to describe Waterville's lovely shaded avenues and streets, its Masonic Block, which "is a great addition to the fine business blocks, an ornament to the city and a monument to the Masonic fraternity",<sup>20</sup> its Colby University, its newspapers, its hotels and so forth. In an "advertising" manner, Waterville is described as a place where

work is plenty, wages good, cost of living cheap, the city is in good condition, public improvements are pushed rapidly, rents are moderate, real estate is advancing. . .As before stated Waterville is the distributing point<sub>21</sub> and supply depot for a large surrounding region.

Most accounts of Waterville including one in the memoirs of Abner Small<sup>22</sup> from the Civil War period describes Waterville in such positive terms. There is no doubt that Waterville's business and industrial potential was realized to some degree after 1874 as the population increase would indicate. Most accounts indicated the beauty of its elms, churches, and surrounding farm lands. However, whether the business, newspaper or journal accounts are dealing with the economic or geographic aspects of the city, they fail to "recognize" the area of the city that the first French-Canadians settled in and its importance to the economic growth of the city. In fact in most published sources on Waterville prior to 1900, the French Canadian element is seldom or never mentioned.

The French-Canadian community of Waterville began with the immigration of Jean Baptiste Mathieu in 1827. Mathieu settled in the area known as the "Plains" located on 134 Water Street.<sup>23</sup> As other immigrants came to Waterville with the building of the "Kennebec Road", with the log drives, etc., the French population grew steadily. Many of the French-Canadian men were employed at local foundries such as James Poulin whose father Fredrick Poulin had immigrated in 1844.<sup>24</sup> The Cyr's family, the Marcou family, the Rancourt family, to name a few who were residents of Waterville prior to the building of the Lockwood, were employed in various manners.<sup>25</sup> The earliest immigrants can best be described as "jacks of all trades" since there are no indications that they relied upon one business for employment. Although it is commonly believed that a large proportion were woodsmen, there was no occupation that was favored in the off season or from year to year. As a labor group, the French-Canadians of Waterville did not have the common bond of the same employment. However, as an ethnic group, they had the bond of their French culture that stood out in the predominately Yankee city.

These early immigrants who generally settled in the southern end of Waterville brought their language, their traditions, and their religion with them. The Roman Catholic Church of the French-Canadians played an important role in this new community on the "Plains." During the first half of the nineteenth century, Waterville's French Catholics relied mostly upon visiting pastors such as Father Fortier who visited the city in 1841 and Father John Bapst, in 1848, who performed services in the home of Jean Baptiste Mathieu.<sup>26</sup> By 1851, the French residents erected their own church, St. John's on Grove Street which seated 300 people.<sup>27</sup> By 1871, St. John's was found to be inadequate and under the direction of Father Hall, Saint Francis de Sales was erected and began services by June 1874.<sup>28</sup> As a "rival" church, one that never succeeded in attracting a large proportion of the immigrants, a French Baptist movement was initiated by a Golby College theological student, Jonathan Furbrish, in the 1830's. The movement later built a church on Water Street called "mittaine" or "meeting place."<sup>29</sup> The French churches served as meeting places for the French immigrants who recognized few of their own traditions in this Yankee community.

The church not only served a religious purpose but a cultural purpose as well. As represented by their pastors, St. John's and later St. Francis were the "bastions" of the French culture, especially of the French language which was used in the sermons. The pastors were also relied upon to guide the French in their familial relationships. Often seen as advisors, the priests were the most educated of the community, knowledgeable in reading, writing, and the classics to name a few areas of their education.\* With the establishment of the French church prior to the operation of the textile mill, Waterville appeared to be less alien to the large influx of immigrants that came in the 1880's to the

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\* For Example, Father Charland, pastor of St. Francis de Sales, 1880-, was a renowned classical scholar and bilingual.

1900's. The parish provided a familiar aspect to the French-Canadian immigrant's former life in Canada.

Prior to the erection of the Lockwood Mill, the railroad built a line called the "Somerset & Kennebec" from Augusta to Fairfield.<sup>30</sup> Various local Maine lines were consolidated under the corporate name "Maine Central Railroad" in 1862.<sup>31</sup> With the railroad's expansion, Waterville's business sector experienced a boom as various firms took advantage of the city's central location. As Waterville's position as a railroad center emerged, quite a number of immigrants were attracted to the North End of the city where many French-Canadian men were employed as laborers or "gravel gangs" upon the construction of the rails. The railroad, although not to the same degree as the Lockwood, provided employment for some of the immigrants. However, its most important role was its vital position in the economic expansion of Waterville since it provided the necessary transportation of goods to other localities.

As the economic potentials of Waterville budded in the town's small industries, water power and railroads during the middle of the nineteenth century, the French-Canadian element of the city began to set its cultural mark by, for example, building their own churches as they settled upon the "Plains." However, as noted before, it was not until the Lockwood Company was completed in 1874 that a large French-Canadian migration followed in its wake. As a result of both interconnected occurrences, the character of Waterville became fundamentally changed from a rural town to an industrial town. The "nomades" style of the French-Canadians between Canada and the United States ended as permanent occupations became prevalent.

This wave of immigrants arrived in the Elm City settling near the Lockwood Mill, which had been built adjacent to the Kennebec River on Water Street in the "Plains" area. As in other textile towns, the new immigrants tended to settle in

ethnic neighborhoods that consisted of company houses, boarding houses, privately owned tenements and private homes. The company houses which were located on Oxford Street, Kennebec Street and Green Street in Waterville and Clinton Avenue in Winslow were built as duplexes with a kitchen, two rooms usually used as bedrooms and an unfinished attic.\* These rows of identical duplexes were located conveniently near the mill, since there was no form of transportation for the workers other than walking. The company housing of the Lockwood attracted the French-Canadians since few had any other place to go for shelter. Another reason these homes were attractive was the automatic reduction of the rent from the workers\* pay which relieved the workers from worrying about putting aside rent money. Unlike the blocks of numerous streets planned and built by the Amosbeag plan<sup>1</sup> in Manchester, New Hampshire, the Lockwood houses were by no means the dominant form of housing.

Boarding and lodging were methods of housing that served the Irish, French and other ethnic "labor" groups in most industrial towns and were commonly accepted forms of housing in the "Plains" of Waterville. Often lodging with members from their same community in Canada or with their relatives, few French immigrants could afford the pleasure of their own homes, although this remained their ideal. The most respectable manner of housing, especially for the unmarried girls, was with relatives, pointing to what John Modell calls "a lingering societal preference for family governance for women."<sup>32</sup> However, it became necessary for many to seek lodgiug in boarding houses run by French-Canadians.\* The

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\* The attic was often finished by the families to accomodate their size.

\* Only Lockwood Co. employees could occupy the company houses.

\* Boarding houses were often run by widows who relied upon this income; they were also smaller boarding houses, 7 to 10 lodgers.

relationship between the boarder and the owner was very personal. For example, during periods when the boarder was without a job, they were often required to contribute to the household as best they could. Felexcine Bolduc, an orphan who was employed at the Lockwood in 1898 at the age of twelve, lived as a boarder throughout her teens until she was married. In interviews, various Franco-Americans pointed out three boarding houses near the Lockwood, especially one that was run by a Mrs. Lessard in the 1920's and 1930's. These boarding houses were privately owned, not company owned. In fact most rooms or apartments that were rented were owned by residents who needed the extra income.

Most French-Canadian immigrants lived in privately owned tenements of two to six apartments. Depending upon the size of the families and upon their income, some apartments were overcrowded, others were not. It was not unusual for five or so children to share a bedroom, but there were few extreme cases of overcrowded one room apartments like those in the ethnic neighborhoods of New York City. The housing was by no means luxurious, but as most Franco-Americans pointed out, they were generally scrupulously cleaned and maintained. When incomes and family situations allowed, the new residents sought private housing, or their own two family houses or tenements. Some immigrants moved to farms on the outskirts of the city; however, this movement back to the farm never achieved as significant proportions as did the movement into the "Plains."

The south end, which was distinctly French from 1870 to 1940, developed in a manner that was more a result of French independence than the Lockwood Company's paternalism. Excluding the company house, the "Plains" area grew into a distinctly French-owned community that has often been called a "city within a city." As the major influx of immigrants settled among the earlier French-Canadian immigrants, housing developed, especially as land in the area around Grove Street

called "pointe de petit", owned by Fredrick Poulin, was sold to the French at a reasonable price.<sup>33</sup> Along with the housing, French owned grocery stores, retail stores, and services literally "sprouted" along Water Street. Most Franco-Americans described Water Street as lined with these various stores such as a grocery store run around 1900 by Arthur Daviau. Around 1900, there were approximately seven French grocery stores, light dry good dealers, three French barber shops, a pharmacist, a contractor, an undertaker, and a blacksmith just on Water Street.<sup>34</sup> These businesses were privately owned, managed, and patronized by the French-Canadian immigrants and their children. With their church and a few stores already established prior to 1890, this area of flat land near the Lockwood Mills became even more distinctly French by 1910.

Franco-American family life has come under the scrutiny of historians during the last decade. Marked by the large number of huge families,\* of the reliance upon child labor, and of their docile natures, the Franco-American family has seldom been set in the context of the times, of the economic situation, and of the prejudice and discrimination they were confronted with. Coming to a community run by a people of a foreign tongue and culture, the French families, as the traditional unit, was the first and most noticeable aspect of their culture to undergo the strains of accomodation to the American ways of life. Although many historians maintain that industrialization changed the very nature of the immigrant families from the extended to the nuclear family, Franco-American families showed a remarkable resistance to the stress placed upon them.

In the context of historiography, Tamara Hareñen cites that

Particularly important has been the realization that family behavior was posed differently among different social groups, that people could be 'modern' at work and 'traditional' at home, and that the family exercised the power of initiative and choice in accepting new ways of life.<sup>36</sup>

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\* Most Franco-American families were 5-8 children, although there are a few exceptional families of 14 or more.

This concept of modern at work and traditional at home suits the changing role of the Franco-American family of Waterville. The city's French residents often stressed the ideal of the father as the breadwinner, the sons following in his footsteps as they came of age, the mother at home caring for the family, and the daughters working along side their mothers until they were married. Due to the financial and economic circumstances of the earliest immigrants, this ideal situation was not achieved until one or two generations later. Prior to the child labor laws of 1907 and 1908,<sup>37</sup> Franco-American children were employed as paper boys, baby sitters, or more commonly in the Lockwood Cotton Mill. Some were as young as nine years old. Even after the child labor laws were legislated, one Franco-American stated that, "they'd take them at 13 or younger if they had a chance."<sup>38</sup> Most interviewees indicated grandparents or parents who worked at the Lockwood #1 Mill from as early an age as eleven until they were married,<sup>\*</sup> moved off to other industries, or retired. Although many French families came to rely upon their children's "giving of their pays," in studies compiled by Dr. Paul Chasse, the reliance of the family upon child labor for income by the French was quite a bit less than the reliance of the Irish families upon child labor.<sup>39</sup> The "giving of pays" did not end with the institution of the child labor laws, since most Franco-American youngsters contributed to the household income until they married or moved away.

The use of the whole Franco-American family as a "unit" within the factory system, although not unheard of, was not "consciously" the financial scheme of the family. Apparently the Lockwood and other factories hired relatives of hard working employees, ranging from sons-daughters, brothers-sisters, cousins, to aunts-uncles. Relatives would hear of job openings and would tell family members of the positions. In the Bourque family, five of the children worked in the

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\* Usually the women left when they were married or before the birth of their first child.

Lockwood. Naomi Giroux of Waterville worked in the Lockwood during the twenties and the thirties under the direction of her uncle who was the foreman. Other industries such as the Maine Central Railroad, the C. F. Hathaway, and the Hollingsworth & Whitney hired the relatives of industrious workers. It must be noted, however, that many members from the same family were employed in different occupations.

Tamara Harehen states that

In Western society today, the major burdens of family relationships are emotional, while in the nineteenth century, they were heavily weighted toward economic needs and tasks.<sup>40</sup>

This economic stress was the most influential force of change upon the Franco-American family well into the twentieth century. To survive financially, even in a prospering town such as Waterville, became a major undertaking of the whole family. At the "expense" of their education, many Franco-American youngsters were placed in the labor force from the 1890's to the depressionary days of the 1930's. Although the ideal situation for women was considered to be housekeeping, the financial situation often necessitated the employment of women, usually the daughters, outside the home. The factories, most notably the Lockwood and the Hathaway avidly sought to employ Franco-American women. From 1890 to 1940, women formed a sizeable portion of the work force, as they do today. Of the Franco-Americans interviewed, most had mothers, grandmothers, aunts or sisters employed in the factory system along side the men. For example, Emily Cyr, Felexcine Bolduc Bernier, Mrs. James Poulin, and Eva Letourneau, to name a few, were examples of the "first generation" (1880-1915) of women who worked at the Lockwood or other factories. Naomi Giroux, Gertrude and Lillian Bourque, Fern Bernier and Erma Pourier are examples of the second generation of women factory workers. Of the first generation, some were employed as early as the age of 12,

a custom that was not considered unusual. Of the second generation, most girls were employed at the age of 15 or 16, the limit set by the child labor laws, usually having just left school to seek work. It was not an uncommon sight to see a teenage girl working a factory through to the 1940's.

In the Lockwood, women were employed as weavers, as spinners, or as bobbin girls. At the C. F. Hathaway, women who were almost all the employees, worked stitching various sections of a shirt, ironing, checking for faults in the merchandise, and in the later years working as forewomen. Although they were generally considered industrious like the men, Franco-American women were not allowed the more "prestigious" positions that paid higher salaries. At the Lockwood, women were not allowed the positions of loomfixers or of foremen. Many attribute the women's lack of physical strength and not discrimination as the reason women were not allowed the "maintenance" position of a loomfixer. The position of a woman foreman was only common to the female dominated C. F. Hathaway Co., but not until the 1930's. However even during the 1930's, men occupied the higher paying, skilled position of the cutters. Throughout the industries of Waterville, Franco-American women remained in the lower-salaried positions.

The fact that these Franco-American women were not allowed the higher paying positions must not undermine the importance of their contributions to the family income. Most Franco-American girls gave their pay checks directly to their parents, receiving a small allowance in return. This income was very often a vital contribution, and in some cases, the source of income for a whole family during economic or financial crises. So as not to distort the custom of "giving of pays", the sons were required to do the same, also getting a small allowance in return.

Franco-American women generally relinquished their positions in the factories upon their marriages or the birth of their first child. Some would continue to do "spare" work, which meant they would substitute for other workers on occasion for supplementary income. Most Franco-American women indicated that it was too difficult for a woman to do anything above and beyond her household duties. Others indicated that their roles were clearly defined as mothers/wives and that employment of a married woman within a factory was the result of severe financial need. Marriage and families were still the ideal; the people interviewed fostered this notion.

In the extended Franco-American family, connections and ties among relatives from 1890 to 1940 were viewed as being stronger during the first and second generation Franco-Americans. In the interviews with Franco-Americans, respect for parents, for siblings, for the institution of marriage, for the authority of the father, and for the raising of children were all highly regarded attributes among the French. The language of French, the religion and the culture were all perpetrated and enforced through the family and the church.

## PART II

### THE FRANCO-AMERICANS OF WATERVILLE AS "BLUE COLLAR" WORKERS AT THE LOCKWOOD, THE C. F. HATHAWAY, AND THE MAINE CENTRAL RAILROAD

The Lockwood Cotton Mill 1890 to 1940:

The Franco-Americans of Waterville who were employed at the Lockwood Cotton Mill are a small sample of a larger group of French textile workers that by 1900 comprised one third of all the textile workers of New England.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the Maine child labor laws of 1907 and 1909, many of these textile workers in Waterville were under the age of 16, often as young as nine. These children, many of whom talked about their experiences in the factories when they were adults, played a significant role in the labor market of Waterville, especially at the Lockwood Mill. In most of the oral accounts, the workers began their careers at the cotton mill at the age of 11 or 12 and worked there until they were in their early twenties. For the "first generation" of workers at the Lockwood, in other words those who worked there from 1890 to 1915, there were a remarkable number of youngsters employed at the mill. The mill also employed Franco-American adults.

When dealing with the Lockwood's labor force in the early years, the role of child labor and child labor laws must be considered. Prior to 1907, the minimum age for children to work in the industry was 12,<sup>2</sup> but there are many indications from debates in the Maine Legislature and from oral accounts that people often changed the ages on birth certificates in order that children may work in the cotton mill. Obviously since they went to work at such a young age, many of the children received very little education. Franco-Americans have come under consistent criticism not only from the Yankee population but from other ethnic groups for depriving their children of education. They did not abuse child labor as much as previously thought. "The 1905 Report of the Immigration Commission indicated that while French-Canadian children contributed one third to the family income, Irish children contributed forty-five percent."<sup>3</sup> This figure is important

since it is commonly assumed that the children of the French of Waterville and other areas all worked at a young age to support their families prior to 1910.

In E. Stagg Whitin's article on "Factory Legislation in Maine" published by Columbia University in 1908, there are many examples of the abuses of child labor. The forgery of children's ages on birth certificates, the reluctance of parochial schools to reveal their enrollment records to authorities, and the textile factories consistent policy of hiring children who are underage and subjecting them to harsh conditions are all areas discussed in the article. Although these abuses especially those of the management of the textile firms are brought up constantly and although the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor consistently lobbied for stricter laws even before the turn of the century, the minimum age was raised from 12 to 14 only in 1907 and to 16 only in 1909.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the child labor laws was debate on shortening hours for the women and the children who manned the factories' machines. Women and children generally worked at least a 60 hour week in the mills of Maine including the Lockwood. The hours were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday; some only worked a half day on Saturday. The Whitin article deals with the efforts of labor groups, the Knights of Labor and later the A.F.L., and of labor sympathizers who lobbied to shorten the hours in the factories. The AFL-CIO report on six decades of history in Maine stated the situation:

The Federation concentrated on reducing the weekly hours of working women and children. There was no limit to the number a man could work. The 54 hour law was enacted in 1915. Immediately organized labor set out to reduce the maximum to 48 hours. The bill passed the House, but died in the Senate of 1919.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until the 1930's that federal legislation along with union agitation curtailed the maximum to 40 hours for factory work. This change came upon the

wave of legislation begun by President Roosevelt and his 'New Deal.'

Safety requirements and workmen's compensation were also consistently lobbied for, but these met constant defeat. In 1911, struggles for workmen's compensation by the American Federation of Labor began,<sup>6</sup> and in 1912 the fight for old age pensions was added to the list of labor's causes.<sup>7</sup> Maine's first workman's compensation law became effective in 1915,<sup>8</sup> but there are no indications that it affected Waterville's industries. Safety requirements, except for boiler inspection were not actualized until after the local industries had been unionized by national unions, which did not happen in Waterville until the 1940's. Old age compensation consistently went down to defeat in 1925, 1927, 1929, and 1931,<sup>9</sup> and it was not until Roosevelt's social security act was legislated in 1936, that compensation was received by factory workers. Obviously, organized labor faced quite a challenge with these consistent defeats that were felt state-wide.

The documents and historical accounts dealing with labor legislation give a bleak view for the success of labor reform. The oral accounts of the Franco-Americans of Waterville dealing with this period from 1890 to 1915 were also bleak portrayals of factory work. Most oral accounts stated examples of the "casualties" due to the lack of safety requirements, workmen's compensation and pensions. They pointed out the difficulties the Franco-Americans met daily upon the job such as prejudice towards "Canucks," language barriers, long hours spent confined within the walls of the factories, the fast pace of the work, the lack of seniority and of redress against the decisions of the bosses.

The traditional view of the Franco-Americans in the factory system has been of docile, timid workers. Falsely branded "the Chinese of the East," the French of Waterville met the same fate as most newly arrived immigrant groups in America.

They were expected to be docile, to be an easily tapped labor source for industry, and to be complacent about their lot. Since most of the new French immigrants needed employment to support themselves when they arrived, they generally did seek employment as "blue collar" workers in industry. The reasons for their quick acceptance of a position at the Lockwood, for example, were numerous. First of all, most of them were "unskilled" in the usual sense, since they had migrated from Canadian farms, lumber camps or fisheries; therefore, industrial work appeared to be a suitable alternative. Second, the language barrier created a "wall" between management and the Franco-Americans, therefore it was difficult to train the earliest immigrants for the more highly skilled positions. Third, they came face to face with a well-established Yankee banking and business community that very often excluded the French-speaking residents from their ranks. As Michael Novak indicated in his book The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics, the upper echelons of business and industry were closed to immigrants, and as most Franco-Americans adamantly stated, the upper management positions were absolutely closed to the French and were only permeated in the last twenty-five years. Although there was no upward mobility within the confines of Yankee owned and managed businesses, there was a great deal of inter-industrial mobility and mobility into ethnically owned businesses and professions. This reliance upon this type of mobility between industries and "ethnic" businesses, which will be discussed later in the paper, was as Ivan Light states in his book, Ethnic Enterprise in America, a result of prejudice against immigrants in Yankee-owned industries. This prejudice forced the Franco-American to realize their ambitions within their own ethnic community instead of the whole, Yankee-oriented community.

In the oral accounts, the conditions at the Lockwood during this early phase from 1890 to 1915 were described as "lousy". The long hours from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. often mean that the workers never saw the light of day, a situation that must

have been especially difficult on the youngsters. Children and adults were expected to work full days without breaks except an hour for lunch, which was very often spent amid the cotton debris from the machines. The pace kept bobbin girls and weavers, for example, running from one machine to another, since their pay was often based upon piece work. This pace was constant from dawn to dusk.

The rooms in which the French worked in the Lockwood ran the full length of the mill. These rooms were filled with one type of machine to produce cotton sheeting such as the looms or the carding machines which were manned by hundreds of employees. The noise was so horrendous that it frightened many of the youngsters who came to deliver lunch baskets to the workers. The noisiest room was the weave room, where the Franco-American men, women and children worked on as many as 8 to 10 looms. The spinning and carding rooms, although not quite as noisy, required the workers to speak in very loud voices in order to be heard. Some claimed it caused their deafness. The noise never ceased from dawn to dusk.

The general description of the rooms was of filth. The workers who cleaned their own machines were often covered with grease from their jobs. Dirt, dust and cotton debris covered their clothes, making some workers appear like "snowmen". Most workers had to change their clothes, in the closets provided by the company, at dawn and at dusk.

There was no protection from unions for the workers against the "whims" of the bosses. Many Franco-Americans recounted stories about children being kicked if they didn't work fast enough. They felt the constant threat of losing one's job without any notice, if the boss was displeased with any aspect of their work. Seniority was not taken into consideration when there were job openings. In fact some Franco-Americans stated that the Lockwood bosses preferred youngsters, because they had more control over them. This changed only with the enactment of the child labor laws of 1909.

The overall view of work in the Lockwood Cotton Mill around the turn of the century was bleak and demeaning. Most of the early French immigrants endured the Lockwood's conditions, because it was financially necessary. It must be pointed out that many of the Lockwood workers left their positions there to open their own businesses or to work in better paying industries. As soon as the opportunity for a better position elsewhere or for marriage arose, many Franco-Americans moved on into other areas as the following excerpts from interviews on the period from 1890 to 1915 indicated.

#### A. Clifford Bernier

Clifford Bernier, a resident of Waterville, born in 1889 in Skowhegan, Maine, was the son of Isaac Bernier and Philomine Turcotte. His father migrated to Maine in the 1880's. Clifford is one of ten children, eight of whom worked at the Lockwood at a very young age, the youngest being nine years old. The family occupied a house in the "Plains" for a period of time. They also occupied a Lockwood Company house in Winslow while Clifford was employed at the mill.

Other relatives, including his sister-in-law, Felexcine Bolduc Bernier, have numerous stories on the awful conditions, the fast paced work, child abuse, and the constant fear of being fired without any recourse. Clifford Bernier and his family spoke primarily French, but quickly acquired a knowledge of the English language. The children of the family gave their pay to their parents until they were adults. Most moved into different occupations as adults. This excerpt is from an interview made on February 3, 1981.

"I was born in Skowhegan. First job (I held) was at the Cotton Mill here, the Lockwood Mill. I worked there thirteen years (1900-1913), the last three years (I was) a foreman there. I was eleven years old. I was in the spinning

room, your Meme (Felexcine Bernier) was in the weave room. I was a young boy, cleaning the machines, cleaning and sweeping until I was twenty-one years old. I wanted to get married and quit that job (sweeping and cleaning). I went to the same place (the Lockwood), but I was boss for three years."

"They stopped hiring young kids, (around 1909, when the child labor laws were enacted). Children had to be 16, or else can't be hired, and so made the mill awful scarce (empty). And my big boss, my overseer, was after me to drive, drive, drive all the same. We didn't have half so much people; so I left, and I worked the railroad shops. I worked at the railroad shop as a car repairer."

"After I worked at the railroad a little while, the boss at the mill (the Lockwood), came to talk French with my wife and me. He says he'd like to see me back at the mill. My wife says, he can go back to the mill if he wants to, but if he goes, I'll let him go, I'm going to part with him. Boss says, Why? She says, I've been with him five years, . . . and I never knew he had a heart; now, she says, he's a good man. . . I had a better job (at the railroad car shops). I was satisfied and making more money."

#### B. Napoleon Marcou

Napoleon Marcou, a noted local attorney active in politics, was born in 1888. His father who was employed at the Lockwood was born in 1868 in the "Plains" area. His mother migrated from Beauceville around 1885 and was also employed by the Lockwood. Napoleon Marcou's wife worked in the mill a teenager around 1908. In his interview, he recollects their experiences and stories and the scenes of the Lockwood that he remembers himself.

"My father worked in the mills, the Lockwood Company. I imagine his brothers and sisters did the same thing. Conditions were very bad, some of the foremen kicked the boys around, the girls around. They were making \$5 every

week, 6 in the morning to 6 at night, everyday, including Saturday. My father was born in 1868, probably worked there in 1876, something like that. Even in 1886 to 1900, bad from that period, because I remember myself. Boys working in the mill for \$5-\$6 a week, or something like that. A lot of the young girls worked there. Most of the first people that came worked in the mills; the younger people, you know, and the women. The men after awhile started working in the woods as lumbermen . . . you know . . . driving wood down the Kennebec. My father helped when they built the Scott Paper Company, the Hollingsworth & Whitney at the time. My father was ambitious; he went to night school. He spoke pretty good English. We all went to school, there were eight of us."

"My mother came after my father. She came from Beauceville. She came with her sisters and some of her brothers and went to work in the mill, the Lockwood. She came in 1886, I think. They were married in 1887. I was born in 1888. I'm 92 years old. I'm the oldest in the family."

"My mother worked after she was married - part time. We used to call it 'spare'. Somebody was sick; she'd replace them. And it gave the family a little additional money. Maria Marcou (his mother) was born March 15, 1863. She was older than my father. She got through with the Lockwood as soon as she didn't have to. We lived on Redington Street. There were four or five children. My father was getting \$7.50 a week and that didn't go very far. To stretch it, she'd work spare, a week or a few days. She took the place of somebody else. She was a weaver. Weavers make more money. In her day, they's have eight looms. Others would have 6, 4 or 3. They got paid more if they had more looms. I remember my uncle used to make \$12 a week, they used to figure it by the pound."

"People sent children in the mills to help the family. They'd change the date of birth. There was a woman in Winslow who'd change the birth certificate, so the kids could go into work. Say they were seven years old; she'd have that they were 15."

"My wife died 10 years ago. She was French-Canadian. Her family came from Beauceville and settled in Waterville. Her father worked driving a team for the Scott. Her mother stayed home, she didn't work. She (his wife) worked at the Lockwood Mills, and then she went to work for the Scott, the Hollingsworth & Whitney at the time. She was 15 or 16 years old when she started. She was born May 1, 1893. She didn't like working over there (the Lockwood), they were abused. She did spinning. She like H & W better. She didn't work after we married. Most women work for awhile - until they had children. . ."

"They (the French) would work in the mills when they came. They started working in the department stores like Emery Brown. They worked as maids and housekeepers for the rich people. Some of them were ambitious like the Dubords and Doctor Poulin. A lot came here and were illiterate except for French. The ~~R~~mes went to night school. . .some weren't ambitious, and they were not encouraged by the powers that be, you know."

### C. Clayton LaVerdiere

Another Franco-American recalled his memories of his neighborhood of his childhood years, the "Plains". As a columnist for the Waterville Morning Sentinel, Clayton LaVerdiere's speciality has been recording "glimpses" of the past. This excerpt on the early Franco-Americans as textile workers is a minor part of a fascinating interview on the life on the "Plains."

"My father migrated from Canada as a young boy. At the age of 12, he was working in the Lockwood Mills, beginning his day at 6 a.m. and working until 6 p.m. and until noon on Saturdays, for a rate of \$12 a week. There were days in the fall and the winter when he never saw the sun. He would go in when it was dusk, work; come out in the dark, - as a young boy of 12. And the stories that he tells about his clothes, his head and his face coated with lint like a

snowman and turning his pay over to his father, because the family was the basis of the culture. That was all they had, each other."

"All they had to offer them, when they came, was their bare hands and their strength and determination. They had no skills. They were not highly literate. There were a few lawyers, educators and professionals in their ranks. . ."

"They were living on the farms of Canada. . .They came when it was a time of great industrial revolution in this area, New England,. . .like Manchester, Augusta, Lewiston, Waterville, Lawrence, Massachusetts. . .They migrated here, some of them in carts, some of them on foot. There were stories, I have heard, of people walking all the way from Quebec to the Waterville area to find their new fortune, because they had known nothing else but abject poverty where they had been. So naturally where the mill was is where they tried to make their homes. This area called the "Plains" became the center of this new immigrant group."

The "second generation" of workers, those employed at the Lockwood Cotton Mill around 1915 to 1940, experienced many of the same conditions as their predecessors. With the enactment of the child labor laws in 1909, most began working at the age of 15 or 16 after having completed grade school and usually junior high. This "generation" of workers began their years of employment when the textile industry was beginning to feel the North Eastern textile depression caused chiefly by southern competition. The most vocal of these workers were employed during the national depression which was also the period in which major strikes occurred. The economic situation throughout this period was precarious as newspaper and business accounts revealed. This affected the textile firms and their employees.

The economic stresses within the industries and the financial stresses upon the Franco-Americans thwarted much of the efforts for labor reform, but efforts

were made in the face of such economic insecurity. Efforts to have safety requirements, comprehensive workmen's compensation, and old age compensation legislated were constantly defeated. During the 1920's, the AFL points out that wages kept "sliding and sliding". This period which the federation calls the dark decade from 1924 to 1933<sup>11</sup> met with little change. It was not until the 1930's, with the national strikes that reverberated throughout the textile industry and with the wave of reform that was pushed by the Roosevelt administration that the conditions for and the attitudes of labor changed noticeably. The Franco-American laborers and politicians of Waterville actively participated in and, in some cases, initiated these changes.

The oral accounts of the French who worked in the Lockwood during the 1930's reveal that little labor reform had been achieved prior to this time. There were many changes that did affect the 'atmosphere' of the Lockwood. French foreman became much more common, and these bosses apparently would never have been allowed to abuse youngsters or women to the same degree as earlier bosses; because, as some stated, the French community, which had become more distinct and influential throughout this period, would never have allowed it. By 1940, the hours had been curtailed from the 60 and 54 hour days of the "first" generation to 40 hour days for most factory positions. Other changes that affected the atmosphere were the higher levels of education achieved by the workers, a reason many became foremen, and the increasing number of bilingual Franco-Americans. A major change, that had occurred slowly since 1890, was the "growing" acceptance of the French due to their good working habits, their business contributions and their increasing numbers.

The oral accounts on this period from 1915 to 1940 contain a remarkable variety of details especially details on their self-reliance in the face of financial crises. During the depression, a single member of the family, not

necessarily the father, became the sole breadwinner because of rampant unemployment. The closing of small French owned enterprises forced many young adults to seek factory work at the expense of their education. The scarcity of jobs and the slowing down of production were harsh realities that the French had no choice but to cope with. Although an "Industrial Survey of Waterville, Maine" compiled by Franklin L. Campbell in 1935 states that business conditions, transportation, and educational advantage were far above the average of New England cities of the size of Waterville, the interviews indicate that shifts were laid off or in some cases hours were extended and pay was decreased at the Lockwood.

Although the Lockwood Cotton Mill survived the depression and the national strike of 1934, the wear and tear of southern competition and economic insecurity began to show. By 1935, the Lockwood Company employed 215 men and 274 women,<sup>12</sup> down from the 1,200 to 1,300 hands who were employed there in 1890.<sup>13</sup> It was out distanced by the Hollingsworth & Whitney Paper Company which employed over 1,000 hands in 1935.<sup>14</sup> Keyes Fibre Company, the Maine Central Railroad, the Wyandotte Worsted Company and the C. F. Hathaway closely tailed Waterville's former industrial "giant" with approximately 300 to 400 employees a piece. These other industries did not necessarily pick up the Lockwood's former share of the labor pool during the depression. From a total available labor pool of 5,976 in Waterville and the surrounding territory, there were a total of 2,671 unemployed workers. The depression took its toll.<sup>15</sup>

Confronted by the reality of unemployment, many Franco-Americans who were employed at the Lockwood and at other industries valued the simple fact that they held a job. Many of the Franco-Americans, who dominated the employment ranks of the industries affected by the depression, were forced to shift from one job to another, adapting to the different areas of work. Most accounts picture the French as being very willing, adaptable, responsible and good

workers. Where the traditional view fails is the image of as docile. They were by no means docile dogs in the industrial machine, but a group who due to the financial situation of the times managed as best they could. They were a mobile group, but between industries and ethnic businesses and professions due to the prejudice of the period. They also formed the bulk of the industrial workers who stuck in the textile industry in 1934, as will be discussed in Part III.

The most remarkable aspect of the following excerpts of interviews with Lockwood employees was their expressions about the happier aspects of their work, their friends, their activities, and the fun they had while they worked while they were younger. This is remarkable considering the economic situation of the 1930's.

The following account of the Lockwood's conditions during the 1930's was given primarily by Naomi Giroux, but many of the statements that verified or supplemented what she said were made by her husband Albert. Both spent most of their lives living in the "Plains" area of Waterville. Naomi Giroux, the principal speaker, was a boarder at Mount Merici Academy prior to working at the Lockwood Company in 1922. She was also employed at the Wyandotte Worsted Company. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, she was employed at Waterville's City Hall. She was elected to the state legislature in 1967 for two terms.

Noami: "My uncle was boss, that was how I got the job at the Lockwood. Joseph Letourneau, that was my uncle. I worked in the spinning room. I started at 15 years old. My aunt worked in the weave room, Eva Letourneau. I worked in the spinning room, it was noisy but not as bad at the weave room. The looms, they made a lot of noise, but it was still noisy. If we talked, we had to holler. I'm so used to talking and hollering loud even now."

"My uncle, Joseph Letourneau, was an overseer. There were other French overseers."

"We had to work, of course. We were quite young; we liked to play around."

Albert: "You didn't need any education for it. I was a 'sweat shop'."

Noami: "We were working from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday 7:00 to 11:00, and the pay was \$9.50 a week in those days. I didn't give pay at home, they (her aunt and uncle) made me put it in the bank, that was alright. (Albert Giroux give his pay at home.)"

Question: What about breaks during the day, were they allowed?

Noamie: "We had so many things to doff<sup>\*</sup>, take full one and put an empty one on. We'd go outdoors, there was a park up there where the bakery is. We used to go out and sit on the lawn there. My uncle would come and whistle to us a few minutes before we were to start. We'd go back to work and start again. We had so many frames to doff; and after you were through, you'd have half an hour before the others were ready. The more you loaded, the more time you had to yourself."

"We were all French and we spoke French all the time. We were all French working together, and other people from Winslow, French people too. My uncle got mad at them often. He'd scold them, because we'd play. You're not here to play, you're here to work, he'd say. We'd fool around quite a lot. It was fun. I worked there 19 years."

Question: Were there any safety precautions?

Noami: "No. I caught my hand once between a post and a truck there. Mr. Martineau, (another boss), brought me to the drinking place, the sink, and washed my hand. Just let cold water run over my hand. They had things in the office, bandaids and things. I don't know how many splinters I got in my fingers."

Question: Were there any age requirements for the employees?

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\* Doffing was removing full bobbins from a textile machine.

Albert: "When you was, in our time, 13 or 15, you could work summertime. You couldn't get regular hours."

Noami: "I was 15, August 25 or August 26, 1922, I went in. No one had to sign papers to let me work."

Question: Were the youngsters happy there?

Albert: "They seemed to like it alright, they had to work for a living. They didn't go to school too much."

Noami: "I didn't have to leave school, but I did."

Albert: "She's just like me, I was third in my family and we were a large family, (seven children). We had to work to help out."

Noami: "More women worked there then men. The weavers like my mother (aunt). They were usually young girls, they made good money. Some married women worked there too."

Question: Were there any changes in hours or conditions before 1940?

Noami: "Then we used to work nights, come out in the morning, 11 to 7. We'd come out in the morning with snow up to our waists. We'd come out in the morning with the snow up to our waist. We'd throw snow balls and play in the snow. We were young; we had a ball."

Question: Were the other youngsters you worked with from the "Plains" area?

Noami: "Most who worked at the factory lived in this area, (the Plains). There were some around Kennedy Drive, around Green Street and around this territory. . ."

"There were three boarding houses. Well, there was Mrs. Lessard. We used to eat over there. She was very friendly with my mother and father, (her uncle and aunt, the Letourneaus). We ate there three meals a day for awhile. We didn't have food in the refrigerator. Ate there morning, noon and night."

Albert: "Well we weren't out of work until late, you were too tired to cook."

The next account of the Lockwood's workers in the depression was related by Gertrude and Lilian Bourqne, sisters from the Waterville area. Gertrude started to work at the mill in 1932. Lilian went to work there in 1936, but remembers the mill and its workers and strikes prior to that time. They worked at the Lockwood until it closed in 1955.

Gertrude: "I started in 1932, not 1936 when social security started."

Lilian: "I went to work after I graduated from the eighth grade in 1934. And I went in in 1936, but then we weren't paid, we had to learn."

Gertrude: "I was one year, I had to learn before I got paid."

Lilian: 'I did too.'

Gertrude: I had to be 16 to get my frames. I used to run frames in the card room. Had to put bobbins on the machines and it would spin. It's the beginning of the spinning of the thread for weaving. Then the thread went into the cloth halls, that's where the sheets were made. We had it when it was still thread."

Lilian: "The room was loaded with people. Most of Waterville was in there for awhile. It was noisy but not compared to the weave room. We worked in the card room on doff frames."

Gertrude: "Those frames were really big, you had to run to the end."

Lilian: "The card room was nice, better than the weave room. No agruments! No jealousy!"

. . .

Lilian: "We worked 40 hours. I was almost 16 when I started."

Gertrude: "I was 15."

Lilian: "Quite a few of our friends worked there, but most of them were older. . .Oscar Brown, who used to play the piano; well, he worked with us. . ."

Gertrude: "Ora May Vashon worked over in the weave room. . .and Lessard . . ."

Question: Were there any breaks?

Gertrude: "No, except lunch, unless we go sneak out and have a smoke in the fire room. -- I did that quite a few times."

Question: Was the work fast paced?

Lilian: "Well the pace was fast for those on piece work. . ."

Gertrude: "You had to keep the machines going."

Lilian: "They made their money by the amount of work they put out; myself, I was paid by the hour."

Question: Were the employees mostly French?

Lilian: "Most of the people were French. . .We spoke French. . ."

Gertrude: "There were quite a few Syrians like Jabar in the early years. They were frame tenders. . ."

Lilian: "Bosses didn't mind if we spoke French; they spoke French themselves -- there was John Labbee, Wilfred Rancourt and Arthur Jacques. . ."

Gertrude: "They were the bosses while we were there."

Lilian: "People got along with the bosses."

Question: Were the conditions the same for the weave room?

Gertrude: "We never worked in the weave room, but went in there."

Lilian: "I worked just a day in the weave room. I hated it there."

Gertrude: "It was noisy, and a bobbin could slide off and hit you right in the head."

Gertrude: "I worked in the card room five years from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., then I went on days. My sister Theresa and I worked nights and afterwards

we'd go downstreet and have french fries or fried clams. Then we'd come home and laugh and laugh, and we wouldn't go to bed until 2 o'clock in the morning . . . There used to be three shifts, 7:00 to 3:00, 3:00 to 11:00, 11:00 to 7:00. At first, there were only two shifts. The same amount of people to run each shift. . ."

Lilian: "We had half an hour break for lunch."

Gertrude: "I used to sit behind a frame to eat, not to get dust in my food, -- but it was fun. Especially the second shift."

Lilian: "At the Lockwood, the only days off we got were Christmas and New Years. In the later years if you wanted two weeks off, you had to get someone to replace you. Someone who had worked there. A lot of married women did this. They were 'spare' workers."

Question: Was there any workmen's compensation?

Lilian: "I was out for two months on account of my hand. I didn't collect anything. No pensions, no nothing!"

Gertrude: "There would be so many days without an accident; they'd count the days. Like the time I hurt my arm over there, they had had so many days without an accident. And they were proud of that. I had tried to close a window with a broom. The broom went through the window and a piece of glass landed on my arm. Boy, did I bleed. I was way at the other end of the front office. I had to run. They took me to the old hospital, and I didn't go back, so they lost that perfect record. I had lost so much blood, I couldn't walk. I got hell for closing that window. . . Then when they had the nurse there, way down at the other end, near the Winslow bridge, we were at the other end. You had to walk all that way to the office where the nurse was. That was later, much later, when they had the nurse."

Question: Were the rooms the whole length of the mill?

Lilian: "The card room was one huge floor."

Gertrude: "On the third floor, that was the card room. On the fourth floor was spinning. The second was the weave room. The first was the pecker and the weave room. These rooms were the whole length of the mill. The pecker room was near the street. That's where they had those huge bales of cotton. That's where they'd come in. After they were done, they'd go to doff frames, then the big slubbers, and then they'd come to us. Both mills were laid out the same. We worked in the #2 mill. It was quite a process."

Lilian: "The machines were side by side; the ones you worked were all together."

Gertrude: "They had on woman on so many machines. In the weave room, they had so many machines, the length of this whole room (i.e. 15-20 feet). The bobbin girl would run all the time!"

Lilian: "It was dirty there, we had to change our clothes."

Gertrude: "If you went in there like this you would have come out white."

Lilian: "There was quite a lot of grease too -- because we had to do the cleaning ourselves."

Gertrude: "There were all those gears, there that we had to clean. We'd stop the machine to clean the gears, but people would get their fingers caught in it. Well, when you were done cleaning, you would have grease up to here (indicates her elbows). But I used to love it, the dirtier I was, the better . . ."

Lilian: "When we started to work in the card room, we worked two frames. Then we went to four frames."

Gertrude: "You'd doff one, another would stop and you'd have to run to do it. And . . .three shifts. . .what a mess we had in the morning! But, we survived!\*

Both Gertrude and Lilian worked at the Lockwood until 1955. They made statements on the strike of 1934, on the raise in wages and curtailing of their hours when the textile code was enacted under the Roosevelt administration, and on the fact that they lost all twenty-two years or so at the Lockwood without a pension. After the mill closed, Gertrude started to work at the C. F. Hathaway in 1955. Lilian followed a year later.

Laurier Pouliotte's 'stay' at the Lockwood Mill was relatively brief compared to Noamie Giroux and the Bourque sisters. His interview is an example of the inter-industrial mobility that was forced upon the Franco-Americans especially during the depression. When the depression was over, Mr. Pouliotte landed a job with the Maine Central Railroad car shops which has always been considered more highly skills and better paying than factory work. He is now retired upon the MCRR's pension.

"I was 16 to have a job at the cotton mill, otherwise than that we'd do jobs here and there. Now, I worked there two different times. I got in there about 1936. I worked there probably three months, then they were shutting off part of the mill. From there I worked at Armand's cafe, washing dishes and kitchen boy. I worked there awhile and got done over there. Then I worked construction here and there, I didn't work steady anywhere. Then in 1936, the Winslow bridge fell down, and I worked there building a temporary bridge. Worked there several weeks, then I heard someone say that they needed a second baker at the Elmwood Hotel and I got the job. I was laid off, when they got machinery to do the job. I could have stayed. They would have given me a cut in wages, but I didn't want it.

I went back to the Lockwood; I had a job in the weave room. Weave room was better pay. The first time at the mill, it was \$11.30 a week pay, that was 7:00 to 12:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Second time I worked in the Lockwood,

I had three different promotions. I earned \$12 a week and we were working only eight hours a day. I lived that way.

' Then wages went up and I got another job. Worked until 1943. I got married in 1943, and I wanted a better job. So the boss gave me a better job, and I got a higher promotion. . .but I had to work nights.

I was at that job what you call a warp man -- big warps, behind the loom, you know, put the cotton on the warp, hard to explain the whole thing -- a good job -- but I worked that way several months. They closed down the shift again. I got laid off. The next day, I went to the Wyandotte; I got a job there, it was during the war. Then they closed the night shift over there too. So then, well, -- there were a bunch of us. The next morning I went to work for the railroad."

The Lockwood workers of the "first and second generations" covering the period from 1890 to 1940 were affected by their financial states. The "first generation", those interviewed and the accounts of others about them, assumed the menial positions at the Lockwood, because their families needed the money and since they were immigrants with a culture and a language that did not "melt" into the Yankee community. The first generation, through hard work and determination, tried to root themselves in the community by holding down the jobs the Lockwood offered and adjusting to a new life in a new country on meager wages earned by working approximately 60 hours a week. During this period they built their churches and parochial schools. Some of the luckier, more enterprising workers went into private business.

The "second generation" lived and worked during the period marked by the decline of the textile industry and the depression. This group of workers faced the strong possibility of unemployment, had to help their family meet their financial needs, and often adjust by going from job to job. This economic insecurity

also faced the women and men employed at the C. F. Hathaway during the 1930's.

The C. F. Hathaway Co. was unique to Waterville's industrial community, because it hired almost exclusively Franco-American women. It is also one of the oldest industries in the area, established in 1837 by Charles F. Hathaway who "began manufacturing shirts in his home, a brick house, now the south end of the old discarded Appelton Street plant."<sup>16</sup> The shirt factory expanded its production throughout the hundred years from 1837 until it moved in 1957 to the empty #2 mill of the Lockwood Company. The histories on the industry give credit for its expansion almost solely to the upper levels of management. In this paper, the previously-unheard voices of the Franco-American women who were employed there reveals the positions they held within the factory system.

Before the turn of the century the employees of the C. F. Hathaway, which numbered around fifty, were generally still local women of English descent.<sup>17</sup> By the 1920's, these Yankee women were almost completely replaced by the Franco-American women; the cutters, a skilled position which was occupied by men only, were also of French descent. By the 1920's production grew and so did the size of the number of employees to approximately 150 to 200.<sup>18</sup> By 1937, the number of employees, still mostly Franco-Americans, was 302.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the period from 1890 to 1940, the reputation of the C. F. Hathaway's shirts was that they were of high quality. This reputation helped the company to expand at a time when many of the old established shirt making firms were forced to close, because they failed to change their production methods to the more modern assembly line methods.<sup>20</sup> Although the Hathaway successfully survived the precarious economic times of the 1920's and 1930's, the shirt factory did take its toll in a decrease in productivity during the depression as indicated in the extensive unpublished masters thesis on the company compiled by Louis Leonard La Pierre. Ellerton Jette who became the president of the company

in 1932 stated that from 1929 to 1932 the Hathaway's sales volume plunged from \$600,000 to \$125,000, but slowly recovered during the rest of the decade.<sup>21</sup>

From all the accounts on the C. F. Hathaway, the workers and the conditions they worked in have been excluded. The Hathaway, unlike the Lockwood, never tended towards hiring the very young children between the ages of 9 to 14. The reason for this could have been Mr. Hathaway's noted religious faith,<sup>22</sup> but it appears more likely that the Hathaway's jobs, stitching, cutting, etc., required the precision and skill of older workers. In the pictures of Hathaway employees in the 1890's, there appear to be no young children, while the early pictures of the Lockwood employees obviously have young children in them.<sup>23</sup>

The Hathaway's working conditions were not quite as bad as at the Lockwood. It was not as noisy or as dirty as the cotton mill; considering the type of work, sewing and cutting, as compared to the weaving process, this is not surprising. The workers explained that the pace was a very individual matter. All the bosses required was that they were working as best they could and were not delivering second quality shirts.

There were "abuses" at the Hathaway. One abuse was that prior to unionization, the women had to pay for their own needles or for any shirts that they had made mistakes on. Another indication of prejudice was that speaking French was actively discouraged by the bosses, none of whom were French until the mid-twentieth century. The women also were unpaid while they learned their jobs; that meant no pay for approximately one to five weeks, which must have been difficult for families depending upon that income.

Other abuses such as low wages and long hours were changed by Roosevelt's minimum wage and labor legislation, by the strike of 1937 that forced president Jette to increase wages and decrease hours,<sup>24</sup> and by the successful organization of a union within the company by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of American in

in 1945.<sup>25</sup> The interviews pointed out that Jette was reluctant to increase wages for stitchers to \$13 with Roosevelt's reforms, but that he had no choice. Not until the Amalgamated became the sole collective bargainer for the employees were grievances such as seniority, workmen's compensation and pension redressed.

The 1930's was one of the most interesting eras for the company since it experienced shifts in upper level management and a decline in productivity which was one of the reasons for striking in 1937. With the sections in the National Recovery Act and the Wagner Act, that later replaced the NRA section, the right to strike and to bargain with management were legislated. By 1937, the Hathaway would have to deal with not only economic changes but a local union, the Waterville Shirtmakers Association.

What was remarkable about this period prior to World War II was the view held by many of the women who worked there for twenty-five or more years that it was better in those days, because there was less jealousy and competition and because today's mill requires a faster pace to keep up with production. They also indicated the good times the French girls had among themselves, sewing quilts at the factory when there was no work coming in or joining each other for a luncheon outing. The contrast between the economic view, the depression of the 1930's and the view of the good old days when the French workers had closer ties of friendship was expressed in following excerpts of an interview with two women who have known the Hathaway for the last 50 years.

Erma Poirier and Fernande Bernier were employed at the C. F. Hathaway from around 1930 until their retirement in 1975. Erma Poirier's parents came from Canada around the turn of the century. Her father was employed by the Hollingsworth & Whitney; her mother was employed at the Lockwood Cotton Mill until she was married. Miss Poirier lived in Winslow most of her life and presently

occupies an apartment in a duplex formerly owned by the Lockwood. She began work at the Hathaway in 1929 at the age of 16.

Fernande Bernier's parents migrated from Canada prior to the turn of the century. Both her parents had been employed at the Lockwood as children. Her father also went into farming, lumbering, a private grocery store, and into his own construction business. Her mother did not work after she was married. Miss Bernier was employed by the Hathaway in 1930 and worked there for 45 years except for a brief period when she decided to look for another job and for the three to four weeks of the strike in 1937. Fernande Bernier worked side by side with Erma Poirier from around 1930 to 1950.

Erma: "My first job was at the Hathaway, that's the only place. . .It was 1929 when I went in."

Fernande: "I went in the last part of '30."

Erma: "I went in before you did. I was 16; I graduated in June, and I went in October. I had gone every day all summer long to try to get in there. Mr. Logan used to tell me I was too young. He was nice though - Mr. Logan."

Fernande: "We worked in one big room in those days. You didn't have sections like what we have today. The cutting room was upstairs -- 40 or 50 people worked there anyways."

Erma: "Must have been about that. There were cutters. . .pressing. . ."

Fernande: "The better jobs -- cutters made the best money. Then stitchers. . ."

Erma: "At that time we were in, no one was making money anyways. We were both stitchers. When I went on collars, Fern, were you already in there?"

Fernande: "When I went in you were on collars."

Erma: "When I first went in I was on making set pockets. I didn't stay long on that, then they put me ou collars. I think you always worked next to me."

Fernande: "Nineteen years, we worked side by side."

Erma: "It was on long tables. . ."

Fernande: "It was really noisy, because the machines were noisy. . ."

Erma: "But you'd get used to it. . ."

Fernande: "Oh, you'd stich your finger so. . .many times! No safety precautions in those days! No benefits either until after the strike."

Erma: "NRA, after that, then we were getting \$13 dollars a week, we thought we were making money."

Fernande: "I went from \$7-8 a week to \$13. . ."

Erma: "A lot of times you didn't even make that, because you didn't have the work! I remember having a lot of pays of \$2-3 a week. Then we were working 10 hours a day\*, 7 to 6, and we had to stay there in case some work came in."

Fernande: "We'd make quilts and things like that in those days."

Erma: "But, you know, we used to have a lot of fun."

Fernande: "More than today. Everyone would get together; we'd talk. If we knew we were going to be 2 or 3 hours without any work, we'd go to the movies. We'd come back -- work an hour. . ."

Erma: "But now, if there was no work, you couldn't get a bunch together. . ."

Fernande: "There's jealousy now. . .There was a while I was on banding collars. When I worked, my regular job was banding collars. I closed collars for a little while when I didn't have any work."

Question: Who were the bosses?

Fernande: "There was one woman, Miss Daly, but the big bosses were all men-- Ashley Logan. The first French one that ever amounted to anything was T. Laliberty.\* He was there just a short while at the old shop. There was Lloyd

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\* Jette reduced the hours to 8 a day during the 1937 strike.

\* T. Laliberty did not come to work at the Hathaway until the 1950's.

Bolduc, but he was a bundle handler. He just gave out work. He really wasn't a boss. They had to take a years training, all the boys.\* They had to learn everything on the shirt." . . .Emile Letourneau, he was one of the main cutters; I don't know how many years he was there. Being a cutter has always been a trade, a very important trade. . ."

Erma: "Mr. Logan was a nice boss."

Fernande: "Jette -- you didn't see him."

Erma: "Jette didn't have anything to do with us. He'd come in, but. . . Mr. Logan was a wonderful boss, and he knew his business. More than they do now. . ."

Fernande: "Jette could have done a shirt from inside out though."

Erma: "Some jobs took longer to learn than others. I remember when I went on closing collars. I didn't like it at all and I kept asking the boss, and he told me it would just be for a little while. I was on closing collars about 45 years!"

Fernande: "Someone worked on a different part of the shirt. It was an assembly line. More than 3/4 were French people. Many 80%. . .We didn't speak French all the time, because the boss didn't like it. She'd get so made if we spoke French. She'd say "this is an American country -- you talk English." -- and so wouldn't the other bosses!"

Erma: "I think it's nice if you know both languages. A lot of people would like to talk French, but they can't."

Question: Were there any breaks in the day?

Fernande: "We had an hour for lunch. We'd sit at one long table together or we'd go out to lunch."

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\* Ellerton Jette, the President, also was trained to sew a shirt.

Question: Were there any age requirements?

Erma: "Had to be at least 16."

Fernande: "Although Lois Lemieux said she went in at 14."

Erma: "Maybe at that time yes. Because, I know my mother, at the cotton mill, she went in there very young. . .but, when we went in they weren't hiring until 16."

Fernande: "My mother went into the cotton mill at 12. . .It was better work than at the cotton mill, because it was all on one shift and it was neat. Not oily like the woolen mill or the cotton mill."

Question: "Were there many married women working there?"

Fernande: "There were some, but there weren't that many in those days. They would work until their first child."

Question: Were there any promotions or seniority?

Fernande: "We got raises when the union got in. . .But, there were no promotions! You started on one job and you stayed on that job forever! You could ask for another job; but if you were good on one job, you stayed there."

Erma: "Like if they had had bidding, I would never have stayed on that job. They took whoever they wanted for those jobs."

Fernande: ". . .seniority -- that started when the Amalgamated came in. Before that, there was no seniority. That was one of the reasons we went into the Amalgamated. . .Compensation -- that went in quite a lot with the union, with the Amalgamated that is. Before that there wasn't any. . ."

Erma: "It doesn't make too, too, too long since they got a pension. And the first ones who got it, didn't get much when they retired. . ."

Question: To help out during the depression, did you have to give your pay to your parents?

Fernande: "I gave pay at home. Did you?"

Erma: "Yes. . . We didn't make much money, but you had to help out. Then not many went through high school. . . Now they almost have to. . . It's not like now."

Fernande: "They never allowed women in professions anyways. That's why they didn't need it. Then some got brave enough to push themselves to go into these positions. There never were any women lawyers and doctors. There were nurses. They wouldn't even allow them in the operating rooms in those days."

Erma: "Now you really have to have an education."

While discussing the depression, both women pointed out that there were a lot of enjoyable activities they could do with their friends that didn't cost any money. They could afford to spend very little on themselves, owning only two dresses, a good pair of shoes and a few other personal items, however.

Fernande Bernier at one point during the depression for approximately a month was the sole breadwinner for their family of eight children, since her father and brothers could not find work except for selling wood and such odd jobs. Miss Bernier may not have completed school as did Erma, who was one of two children. However, Miss Bernier's two younger brothers, Odilon and Albert, who came of age at the end of the depression, both attended college. Odilon taught mathematics at Purdue University and received a Presidential citation for his work at Harvard to break the Japanese Code during World War II. Albert Bernier attended Colby College and Yale University Law School. He joined the law firm of Harold and Richard Dubord, a father and son team who became the first and second Franco-American mayors of Waterville. Albert was Waterville's third Franco-American mayor. This is another case of "mobility" within families.

Another industry included in this study is the Maine Central Railroad. The reasons for choosing the MCRR are primarily because it provides an interesting

contrast to the other two industries and because the MCRR strike of 1922 was the "father" of Waterville's strikes. The railroad, which provided one key to attract industry to the Waterville area since its operations began in 1847, contrasts the C. F. Hathaway because it employed just men, excepting a secretary or two in the local offices. It was a masonic stronghold that kept the better jobs of engineers, for example, out of reach for the Franco-American men well into the 1940's. Finally, it provides a very interesting note; the strike of 1922, a national strike called by the Federated Shop Craft, was conducted by the workers of the MCRR car shops, where Franco-Americans were the dominant number of employees.

The conditions for the Franco-American worker at the car shops of the Maine Central Railroad and upon the "gravel train", the name given to the gangs of workers who constructed the rails, were harsh; but the pay was considered better and the work, more highly skilled, than factory work. The Franco-Americans started from the bottom of the barrel as laborers in the car shops or on the "gravel train," but they could only move up within the skilled positions of the car shops, where the train's cars were repaired or built. Not one person interviewed about the MCRR could think of one Franco-American who held the position of an engineer during the period from 1920 to 1940. They all indicated that the Franco-Americans "place" at the railroad was "on the rails" or in the shops, i.e. the more manual forms of labor. One Yankee woman who was employed at the railroad in the office and whose husband, a mason, was employed as an engineer, stated that many of her husband's co-workers were masons, none were French.

The car shops, the "Franco-American stronghold," employed approximately 300 men in 1890;<sup>26</sup> 400 in 1935.<sup>27</sup> The car shops were exceedingly noisy and very

dirty since the work was all "machine shop" labor. The hours like all industries during this period were long, 54 to 60 hours a week, and very often required overtime.

The benefits at the Maine Central Railroad such as workmen's compensation and pension were non-existent for the workers from 1900 to 1930. The railroad, however, was the leader of reform in industry since seniority was already instituted at the time of the strike of 1922,<sup>28</sup> although it was abused by management in the strike. A pension was instituted in 1937 and it was considered one of the best by the Franco-Americans who were interviewed. Even into the 1940's however, the MCRR only had local shop craft, throughout this period the workers were not affiliated with a national union.

Throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, the railroad came to depend more and more upon the Franco-American men as employees. Within the limits of the car shops, the Franco-American men began to assume positions that were more highly skilled such as a foreman, but the upper echelon positions remained closed. Like the Lockwood and the Hathaway, the French were often bosses over other Frenchmen. Many workers whether in the railroad or factories stated that there were men who were overlooked for positions such as foreman even if they were better qualified. It's ironic that most industries sought French employees at the turn of the century, because they were "ideal" workers.<sup>30</sup> Apparently the MCRR thought the Franco-Americans were only "ideal" for the car shops and the "gravel train." It was these "ideal" workers who struck for better conditions in 1922.

Clifford Bernier and Laurier Pouliotte, both of whom worked at the Lockwood for their first jobs, spent the greater part of their careers at the Maine Central Railroad. Clifford Bernier began working there in 1913, because, as an earlier excerpt stated, the job paid better. He worked there in the car shops

until he retired in 1957 at the age of 68.

Laurier Pouliotte began working at the railroad in 1942. Although his memories of the railroad go beyond the period covered by this paper; his accounts of the railroad during the 1940's provides information on the different jobs, his view of the Masonic order, and the conditions. His interview also included the stories of the older men and their experiences prior to 1940, such as the strike of 1922, which will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. Prior to working at the railroad, Mr. Pouliotte held numerous jobs that were all laid off because of the depression.

A. Clifford Bernier (1913-1957)

"For eight years I was repairing cars on the road from Madison, Waterville, New Port, and South Gardiner. We worked nine hours a day, but I worked a lot of overtime. I'd get out of the shop, then I'd go to work in Gardiner, 2 or 3 hours, then go to another place and work. Sometimes I'd come at 2 o'clock in the morning. That's why I made money there."

"We spoke French, but the bosses were English. A lot of people didn't care to learn English. . .At the railroad shops, we were some hundred men. There were just a few in the office. The French worked mostly in the car shops. There were no French engineers. There were a few Irishmen. I didn't know much of the train men. I didn't work with them at all. I was repairing the cars over there. That's all. I worked hard."

"It was really noisy. We were riveting the stuff, the iron (to the cars). We had a lot of machines going -- it was noisy! I guess that's what makes me so deaf now, so much. . .It was a dirty job, there was a lot of grease. A lot of rust -- rust all around the machines."

"For seven or eight years, I was on piece work. I was leading a group. Now I got to say something about that. I went to school up to second grade. I went to first grade. I left when I was seven years old, and I never went to school after that except at the convent to learn catechism to make my first communion. And I went to work at the cotton mill -- I got a job as boss.\* When I went to work at the railroad shop, they put me as leader of six men right away. I went through just the same. Learning a little. . .looking before somebody else. . .reading a little paper. . .I learned to read so I could vote. . ."

B. Laurier Pouliotte (1943- )

"Railroad, that's where the money was. It was the best job I had. I was a car man, but I wasn't a car man all the time. When I got in there I was a helper. I worked as a helper for four years, then became a car man, that was the top. I was Clifford's helper for a while."

"The car shops were noisy and dirty. We had to change our clothes."

"We had a union, just shop craft when I got in there. We weren't recognized in Washington. Later the AFL came in. I was a car man then, in 1946, 1947. With shop craft it was only 50 cents a month. It was a lot more with the AFL, but wages were much better then."

"The employees were in the average of 300 or more in the machine shop and on freight. There were French, English, Italians -- not too many but some. The French were dominant. If working with another French man, they'd speak French, but it was really English speaking. The main language was English, of course. We learned both when we grew up. We spoke French in our home; out in the yard, well, we played with English kids."

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\* His last job at the Lockwood was the position of loom fixer, one of the highest paying jobs a Franco-American could achieve within the cotton mill.

"At one time, the Masonic was strong; up to 1950, it was stronger than anything else. Then it started to change, they weren't strongest later. But they weren't any stronger than anyone else.\*"

". . .A carman was supposed to be able to build a box car from the wheels to the top. That's skilled labor. But, I worked a lot on air brakes myself. As a helper, I learned the skills. A lot of them, when they started, they started as laborers. But, I got in as a helper."

"A laborer is placed in fields or all on the irons -- that's no skill. Anyone could do it, but they stopped that. Now they all have to do labor, then to helper, and then promoted to a carman. That's the way it is now a days, because of seniority, have to try a laborer first, if he has the qualifications. They have 30 days to qualify or the company can send them back. You had to work up. . ."

The railroad did not experience the same recession as the textile industry did, but the national depression did have its affects upon the quantity of business conducted by the railroad. The workers employed just after the turn of the century faced a great deal of prejudice from the railroad men who belonged to the Masonic orders, as many interviews pointed out. The Franco-American railroad men did not achieve greater "acceptance" until after World War II, when their own ethnic group began to exercise their clout that was "afforded" by their increased numbers and by the economic prosperity of the 1950's and 1960's. However, their first attempt to vocalize their "grievances" was in the car shop strike of 1922, which was the "father" of Waterville's strikes.

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\* Like the Elks, etc.

### PART III

#### FORMATION OF LABOR: STRIKES OF 1922, 1934 and 1937

Labor organization in Maine has been generally considered very slow to develop national unions. Many accounts or personal opinions on Maine's labor organization and more specifically, the use of strikes as labor's tool for the redress of their grievances have stated that Mainers, Franco-Americans included, have been reluctant and too passive to resist the whim's of industry's management. Charles A. Scontras in his article, "The Rise and Decline of the Knights of Labor and the Rise of the A.F.L. in Maine", makes the clearest statement about the causes of the "slowness" of Maine's workers to organize; one that applies very much to Waterville. He states that:

Maine has no mammoth industrial establishments employing thousands of workmen, like the coal mines, iron mills, glass works, etc., of some other states. She has even no large industrial communities, where are congregated great numbers of workmen engaged in the same branch or perhaps two or three related branches of trade. On the contrary her industries are so diversified and so divided and scattered among smaller towns, that it has in the past been practically impossible for anything like an army of workmen having interests and aims in common to gether for united action in a given locality.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons this theory applies to the Waterville area are first the variety of industries, a cotton mill, a woolen mill, a paper mill, a shirt factory, a railroad, etc.; second, the fact that these industries are not really interrelated except for the cotton and woolen mills; and finally, the strength of a solid "ethnic" base in the formation of local labor unions was diminished by this variety.

Economic insecurity was the major factor for the Franco-American search for jobs in the mills at the turn of the century and the railroad, but it did not

stop them later from attempting to unionize by participating in strikes since the Lockwood and Hathaway strikes were called during the depression. Economic insecurity did hinder unionization. "A major effect of the strikes. . .was to create further financial insecurity for the Franco-Americans. Some were without work for months; there were those who found they could not return to work when the lockouts were lifted."<sup>2</sup> There were Franco-Americans reluctant to strike for this reason. Anti-unionism could not, however, have been an inherently French trait, since all three major strikes discussed in this paper, the MCRR car shop strike of 1922, the Lockwood strike of 1934, and the C. F. Hathaway strike of 1937, had walkouts and picket lines that were manned largely by Franco-Americans. To bring the point closer to home, the fact remains that the majority of all strikers in Waterville's history have been French; however, the tags of "Chinese of the East" and "scab" have been consistently and unjustly attached to the French.

The first strike of any importance was the walkout of the car shop workmen at the Maine Central Railroad. The strike was initiated by the Federated Shop Crafts and the American Federation of Labor on July 1, 1922, and it lasted for three months. The reason for the strike was reported by the Waterville Morning Sentinel:

The organizations of the railway shop craft employees have received a vote upon the question of the willingness of these employees to continued to render service under the reduced wages and changed working conditions proposed by the labor board, and under the practices of contracting out work adopted by the carriers, despite the disapproval of the board, the employees have voted almost unanimously not to work under such wages and conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The next day, it was reported "by F. M. Ramsdell, master mechanic, that about 490 men left their places, leaving 60 or 70 men including foreman," and these figures were also reported by the shop men.<sup>4</sup> The day was described as peaceful,

with the strikers holding shop craft meetings at the American Legion while the car shop remained open. In fact, the newspaper reports generally indicate that Waterville was relatively quiet as compared to the rest of the nation. The only reports of violence were the quick appearance and disappearance of an "agitator" on July 12,<sup>5</sup> the rumors that later turned out to be true of strikebreakers being brought in from other areas,<sup>6</sup> and the two local court cases in late July and early August where strikers were arraigned for assault on would be "strikebreakers."<sup>7</sup> Other than these minor "skirmishes," the ranks of the strikers remained solid throughout the duration as the strikers were "marking time awaiting some action on part of the national leaders."<sup>8</sup>

The Morning Sentinel only makes a few non-factual comments on Waterville's strikers, generally reporting only the developments on the national scene of the railroad strike. Some comments indicate a degree of solidarity and possibly some sympathy for the strikers. On July 28, it reported that the "opinions of the strikers in Waterville are varied and interesting yet all have the same ultimate ideas in regard to the troubles that have arisen."<sup>9</sup> Another indication of support was that in the north end of the city, which was populated by a large number of Franco-Americans and railway men, the grocers refused to supply food for the strike breakers.<sup>10</sup> Another indication of sympathy was the report that a speech delivered by Robert Faulkner of Boston, a member of the executive board of the International Association of Machinists, in Castonguay Square, Waterville, on the reasons for the strike was well received by a crowd comprised of hundreds of local residents.<sup>11</sup> These reports do point to a sense of solidarity as do the consistent reports except for one instance that the strikers' lines were unbrokeu during the three months and that the strikebreaker or the "scabs" were not from Waterville.

The local strikers did await the results of the negotiations on the national scene. On July 30, President Harding apparently with the support of the unions, Federated Shop Craft and A.F.L.,

- (1) that the workers would have to live by U.S. labor board decisions in the future
- (2) that those who remained on the job will get preferential treatment i.e. seniority above the workers who struck
- (3) that the men would have to accept recent wage reductions but that there would be further hearings on the matter
- (4) that work would not be farmed out
- (5) that there would be discussions of establishing adjustment boards.<sup>12</sup>

The most important gain here had been the hearings and the discussions of creating the means to redress some of the workers grievances, by establishing adjustment boards. It was the issue of seniority that caused the executives of the railroad to adopt a "no surrender policy."<sup>13</sup> The battle went back and forth between union leaders under the A.F.L.'s B.M. Jewell and the railroad executives Federal troops were called in some states, and finally on September 1, the government received a temporary federal injunction securing that the strikers could not interfere with the railroad's operations.<sup>14</sup> This had little to do with Waterville except that on August 30, the "first break in the ranks of the striking Maine Central shop men since the strike started at the local shops July 1, took place yesterday when a car repairer returned to work."<sup>15</sup> This was the only break within the line reported and it was met with little violence.

After the negotiations on the national scene appeared to be ending the strike, the Maine Central Railroad issued a statement supposedly to break the worker's morale. The MCRR refused to negotiate. The Waterville Morning Sentinel described the last day of the strike,

Yesterday afternoon when news reached the city that the officials of the Maine Central Railroad would not agree to meet the committee representing the members of the railroad shop unions there was a wild scramble on the part of about 200 strikers to get their former positions back at the shops. They summarily left various temporary employments about the city, work which they had accepted for the duration of the strike, and signed up to return to the shops. It is expected that some of these will return today and the remainder next week. In some cases the returning strikers were not accepted. <sup>16</sup>

The strike was over. Ten mechanics returned on September 23, losing their seniority over the non-strikers. Others returned in the four weeks following. Some strikers were never rehired, especially those who had caused any trouble. <sup>17</sup>

The personal accounts of the three months of the strike related the difficulties the strikers had financially during this three month period; they stated that the majority of shop men, Franco-Americans included, were for the strike and supported the local shop craft; and they indicated that there had been more violence than did the newspapers. They also point to the stigma of being a "scab" during the strike. The only indication that the newspaper gives of the intense feeling between the strikers and the strike breakers was the description in Waterville for the arraignment of strikers who assaulted a strike breaker:

In their dirty working clothes, greasy and grimy, many of the having just come from the shops where they were working, the strike breakers and loyal men entered the court room somewhat ill at ease as they felt the eyes of the strikers upon them. <sup>18</sup>

This intense feeling upon the part of the strikers branded these "loyal men" as "scabs" for the rest of their lives. This animosity towards the scabs was present throughout the discussions on the strike. Other trends present in the oral histories were the strikers search for temporary employment, the solidarity of views, and the railroad's policy of not rehiring many of the strikers. Although the strike failed in many respects, returning to previous wages etc., the feelings of those who struck especially towards the "scabs" and towards management

for not rehiring the strikers remained intense.

One account of a Franco-American car shop striker was written by Alan King about his grandfather Joseph Roy, who was born in Waterville in the year of 1898.

In 1922 the big railroad strike took place. My Grandfather like the rest, obeyed the strike order. . .He picketed and shouted for his rights, but never once would he give the other side the press they wanted; never once did he raise his hands against anyone involved. Many the time, my grandfather says, he would come home with a black eye or torn clothes. . .

He worked for the Maine Central for fifty years. And when the fifty years were up, he left without telling anyone. That was his statement: In all the years that he was with the company, never once did they acknowledge his accomplishments, and never once did they promote him of their own free will.<sup>19</sup>

Clifford Bernier also related his story of the strike. Like Daisy Severy whose husband worked as an engineer and who was one of the few women employed at the MCRR and other "wives and workers", Mr. Bernier stated the financial problems of the strike that burdened many of the workers, but he never stated that there was any reluctance on the part of the Franco car shop workers to strike. He was one of the luckier ones; first, because he found temporary employment for the duration of the strike; second, because he was rehired.

"Well, I had a spare room in my house, there was a fellow there come from Boston working on that hospital, (Mount St. Joseph). He asked if he could have a room. Since my house was right near the hospital. So when I come on strike, this fellow says, are you on the strike too. I says, yes! He says take your tool box and come over here -- they'd started building the hospital. That was the best thing I could get, you know."

"So I worked there. He gave me work. There were more of them working there and one comes to me, -- he was pushed by the others, he asked me if I belonged to the union. I says, yes. He says, carpenter's union? I says, no, car man's union. He says, they don't allow you to work with us. I went and told that to the boss. The boss says, they don't want you? You're out on strike, he says, you don't belong to the union? I belong to the union, but its a different union. Well, he says, we'll give you a different job. . . I built shacks there. . .I made the form for the foundation of that

chimney at the hospital. That chimney's 165 feet! Boss had me build that, and I was never to school! . . . I was making less wages, though, than I got at the shop. When I was offered to go back to the shop, I hated to; but when they were done with the hospital, what was I going to do then?"

" . . . When I didn't go right back to work (at the car shop after the strike), I heard my grandfather, my wife's father say, that all the jobs were filled. The boss, the big boss, just lived over here, and I went right there and knocked on the door. . . I went to the door, and he comes and looks at me with a smile. I says, I'm coming to see you to get my job back. I'd like to have my job back. He looked at me and laughed, but I stood it. And, he says, yes, I'll give you back your job, because you never had no trouble. Next day, a friend came and said the boss wants you to come back tomorrow morning. . . ."

"At that time I was out three months. It was hard for some of them. A lot of them couldn't find a job. . . ."

"There was one man, lived around here later, he had to fight, he had to come in with a gun -- he was a 'scab', you know. He came from Canada somewheres, they gave him a good licking one day, and he wanted to come in just the same. The next day he come in with a gun. . . ."

"A man that was 60 or 65, they didn't take him back, they didn't want him back. There were other men, they didn't take back. There were four or five of them, old men, who went on strike, and they did take them back. . . ."

"There were some fights. Some got hurt.\* They didn't take them back in the shop, though. Another man -- they didn't take back at the shop --, was an assistant foreman, who used to live in Fairfield. Because he was a boss, he wasn't supposed to strike, but he wasn't supposed to do anybody's work either. He began to do somebody's work, shift cars. When we came back in, they reported him. He was a 'scab'. So they reported him, and he had to get out. . . ."

"We had meetings. We had the head boss from the union, but I don't remember his name. . . ."

"A lot of them didn't have work. A lot of them were starving while on strike. Some had a little money or a good name. Some got around good, some didn't."

The stories about the financial problems the strike caused, about the "scabs", about the fights, etc. were also remembered by Franco-Americans who were employed at the MCRR after 1922. These younger men recalled hearing the strikes relating the details of the walkout of 1922. The blame for the failure of the strike was

laid upon the shoulders of the "scabs", and "there were a lot of 'scabs', they'd name them. See that guy he's a 'scab', that guy there's a 'scab'."<sup>20</sup> The stigma of the "scabs" or strike breakers "imported" from outside Waterville, as the newspaper stated, remains. Although the majority of the men went on strike and endured it for three months, these Franco-Americans have been called "scabs" themselves. The stigma of the failure of the strike, although the "lines" remained solid, was used as an example by the management of the Lockwood and the C. F. Hathaway during their respective strikes to demoralize their own striking workers.

The next major strike in Waterville was also the result of a national strike; this time in the textile industry. In 1934, in the midst of a depression and of FDR's National Recovery Act which had a textile code and which gave the right for labor to organize without the interference of the employer, strikes at textile plants spread like wildfire during the month of September. The issues at stake were "the right to organize, guaranteed by law, the end of the stretchout, and the 30-hour week with equitable wage adjustment."<sup>21</sup> On September 3, 1934, it was reported by the Waterville Morning Sentinel that

A general strike in the cotton textile industry was called to go in to effect at 11:30 p.m., September 1, as efforts to starve off a walkout affecting about 400,000 workers collapsed. At left (in a photo) is George A. Sloan, president of the Cotton Textile institute, who is representing the manufacturers in the controversy. In the center are Francis J. Gorman (left), chairman of the strike committee, and Thomas F. McMahon, president of the United Textile Workers, who directed plans for the walkout, and who said a strike in silk and other textile divisions -- affecting another 300,000 or 400,000 -- would be called unless demands similar to those upon cotton manufacturers, were met. The strike has been endorsed by William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor.<sup>22</sup>

Maine, however, appeared uncertain. While other New England areas prepared for the strike, textile strikers received the support of Maine Justice E. Holmes, who in a prepared statement on September 3, "asserted that labor should 'capture NRA', throw out its enemies and fill their places with labor men."<sup>23</sup>

He added that "your most powerful weapon is the strike. Labor ought not to surrender the right to strike."<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the workers of Central Maine's woolen industry whose unions were affiliated with the United Textile Association of America made plans for a walkout under the direction of George Jabar of Waterville, the Maine Chief of the United Textile Association of America.<sup>25</sup> Maine's labor situation appeared uncertain, but it would erupt in the following three weeks.

The efforts to strike at the woolen mills affected the Wyandotte Worsted of Waterville, which as George Jabar stated had 413 workers who were unionized.<sup>26</sup> The woolen mill closed without any trouble and "little or no violence was expected."<sup>27</sup> The Wyandotte would not be the "recipient" of a confrontation with labor; the Lockwood would. The Lockwood Cotton Mill, which was unorganized, opened although there had been a call for a strike in the cotton textile industry.

Nationally, thousands of textile workers struck. In Maine, by September 5, 1934, 4,000 of 22,400 textile workers were out.<sup>28</sup> Nationally, the strike was gaining momentum in numbers of strikers and in instances of violence. Waterville still remained quiet.

The fact that Waterville was so quiet does not mean that the Franco-Americans of the town were against labor reform and the right to strike under the NRS.<sup>29</sup> On September 5, the Waterville Morning Sentinel published two statements by two of Waterville's leaders, one indicated the strength of Franco-American support for the NRS, the other points to labor's problem of trying to create a sense of unity among the workers of various industries.

The first statement reported was made by F. Harold Dubord, the highly esteemed lawyer who became the first Franco-American mayor of the town. In a statement for his candidacy for the U.S. Senate he "declared himself a supporter

of the 'New Deal' because, he said, 'I believe it holds much in store for the common man and woman.'<sup>29</sup> This statement is especially important since Mr. Dubord's primary base of support within the town was his own ethnic group, the Franco-Americans who provided a strong democratic faction. Those who were interviewed, Franco-American strikers and residents, portrayed the French of the South and North end's strong sense of identity with and pride in Mr. Dubord's career. In supporting the New Deal, Mr. Dubord vocalized many of his constituencies political views on labor and economic reforms. In fact on September 8, the Waterville Morning Sentinel reported that the strikes were blamed upon the democrats.<sup>30</sup> On September 10, voting in the state and national elections, Waterville gave its support for the New Deal by voting for Dubord. The south end, known as the Plains, voted solidly behind him. In the north end, which was not so completely French, they voted solidly for Dubord and the New Deal, only a little less so than the south end.<sup>31</sup> As they stated in the oral histories, the French backed Dubord, Roosevelt and the NRA.

The other statement reported was made by union leader George Jabar, who had been employed by the Lockwood and later the Wyandotte at one time. At a labor meeting in Madison, Maine, Mr. Jabar appealed for unity among all the workers of the state; a most essential ingredient if labor was to succeed in Maine. "He outlined three big enemies to the strikers. They are the communists, the capitalist, and the fellow worker who becomes a 'scab'. . .and (he) warned against allowing public sentiment to ruin the moral of the strikers."<sup>32</sup> The unity of the Woolen Industry of Central Maine was clear; the cotton industry, more particularly the Lockwood Company of Waterville, was another story.

After taking "Flying Squadrons" from organized woolen factories to Lewiston and other areas to get the workers out of the cotton mills, George Jabar appeared with 200 picketers on September 11, at the Lockwood. The picketing was

done orderly. On that day only one weaver joined the ranks while others made arrangements to join.<sup>32</sup> The next day they gained momentum as new members and "thousands" of spectators joined in. Mr. Jabar marched with 300 picketers, gained 125 new members, who shouted "scab" and "so you still want to work for ten dollars a week" at the employees as they went to work.<sup>34</sup> They closed the Lockwood's night shift and got many of the "undetermined" to leave their machines and go home.<sup>35</sup> On September 14, it was relatively quiet except for the arrest of a Franco-American, Frank Carey, who was charged with inciting a riot while picketing the Lockwood's gates.<sup>36</sup> For the first week of picketing by the "flying squadron" and the new members, the scene remained relatively quiet, deceptively so.

On September 17, the first signs of violence occurred, "six window panes in the weave room being shattered and two women employees escaping being hit as missiles were hurled at them."<sup>37</sup> Many of the employees had to run to work in the mill as picketers concentrated on the Winslow end of the Ticonic bridge and the Water Street gates of the plant. The union claimed 268 new members; the Lockwood claimed only 175 left work while 475 returned to work.<sup>38</sup> The violence would accelerate.

On September 20, 1934, the Waterville Morning Sentinel reported the following scene:

The worst riot ever staged in this usually quiet Kennebec Valley City took place shortly after dawn yesterday when a mob of over 300 men and women barraged the Lockwood Manufacturing Company with stones, chased employees from the plant, and engaged in hand to hand battles with police who managed to starve off the first sensational attack by unionized forces in the current textile strike uprising.

Six men were arrested<sup>\*</sup> as a result of the demonstration which saw frenzied men and women resisting officers and in some

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\* The men arrested were Fred Pickard, Salem Thomas, Charles Maheu, Sylvio Paradis, Amedee Bolduc, charged with malicious mischief and assault and battery of an officer.

instances hurling stones at them. Two official cars were stoned during the demonstration and only tear gas dispersed the mob.<sup>38</sup>

The next day peace was resumed, but only with the presence of the national guard who had been called in.

The frenzy of the strike from the 11th until the 21st was apparent in the oral accounts of the strikers and workers of the Lockwood. In one account, Naomi Giroux related the incident.

"Here it is (she shows me the newspaper headline from September 20, 1934), 1934, when they called out the national guard, and he (indicating her husband Albert Giroux) was going to work at the Scott (the H & W). He called me up, and said don't go in, they have the national guard and an awful lot of trouble. They threw rocks and broke a few windows, but no great deal of damage was done to the mill. They had sticks and they were jumping over the fence. We were downstairs and we took off for upstairs."

"I didn't like it because my father (her uncle) was there. He was still around. And I hated to walk out, because he was a boss there, and because they'd say, there's so and so down there, let's go out with them. They should have met and talked about it, and then say we'd all go out together, but they didn't."

"We pulled all our blinds at home, because we were afraid they'd break our windows. They had a meeting right back here (indicated behind Water Street), because there were no houses there. They went by, chanting and hollering. I could hear them."

"I did join them, but not there. I joined them when I went to work at the Wyandotte. At the Wyandotte, I was older then, we didn't play as much. They had unions there. I had had it with the Lockwood."

When Lilian and Gertrude Bourque were asked if they recalled the Lockwood strike of 1934, they revealed these memories.

Lilian: "Remember the strike, the stones, George Jabar? Oh yes! Oh my gosh, that's a long time ago, but I remember."

Gertrude: "And we used to have a song we would sing going up the hill. What was it we used to sing. 'We will not be moved. . .like a tree standing by the water.' All of us struck. . ."

Lilian: "All but the management did, they stayed. . ."

Gertrude: "It wasn't really violent at all."

Lilian: "We just walked in front of the Lockwood Mill. We sang."

Gertrude: ". . .We'd go so many hours, then others would take over so we wouldn't always be the same ones. Jabar came down to talk. He was the head one for the union."

Lilian: "Wasn't violent. There were policemen around -- oh yes! They left the strikers alone. We marched up and down the street. There were quite a few French as leaders. . .People wanted to join the union!"

Their view unlike Naomi Giroux was of a peaceable strike. Most sources pointed out that stones had been thrown, but it was believed that "hoodlums" had thrown them not the picketers. They also recalled the memory of George Jabar, marching to the plant early one September morning with hundreds of picketers. As young children, especially an account given by Clayton LaVerdiere, a columnist for the Waterville Morning Sentinel, the scene of the picketers yelling "scab" and trying to get the workers out of the factory remains vivid. They also remember hundreds of spectators and a mass gathering in an open field where Jabar spoke to the people. They remember the picketers walking up and down the street, speaking in French and English, with some Lockwood employees joining their ranks. They also remember that many refused to join the union. Unlike the Wyandotte, the Lockwood was never successfully unionized.

The most detailed oral account comes from George Jabar, the United Textile Workers of America's Maine Chief. Jabar's account is one of the most interesting and detailed interviews on the 1934 strike, the place of the French in the unions, and the 1937 Hathaway strike which will be dealt with later. Mr. Jabar's account reveals a great deal about labor in Maine, especially the textile industry. He had been employed at the Lockwood and the Wyandotte prior to becoming a union leader. Here is his account of the 1934 strike.

"The Amoskeag strike is way back<sup>\*</sup> and that's where they learnt; they went through what other cities did later. . ."

"Waterville was in the 'middle' of the group that unionized. I developed from Waterville in the woolen industry. We started organizing around the Roosevelt Era, -1932,- when he was elected. And when we had the depression, they established the NRA, it's the blue eagle. Under the blue eagle, in section nine, it gave the right to the workers to organize without the interference of their employer.<sup>\*</sup> It set up codes, setting up minimum wages for the textile industry, which dominated this area. The minimum wage was 25 cents an hour for cotton and 30 cents an hour for woolen. That was between 1933-34; I got interested. They formed a union under the AFL."

"The major strike of 1934, when we first organized, you had the woolen well organized. You had Waterville with the Wyandotte Worsted, the American Woolen Mills in Vassalboro, American Woolen in Skowhegan; Madison was also organized. Now the union in those days was just on paper, there's no compulsion to meet with the union or sign an agreement."

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\* It was in 1922.

\* This was declared unconstitutional after the strike. However, Congress passed the Wagner Bill to deal with collective bargaining, it was declared constitutional in 1937.

". . . We had a strike in 1934 under the NRA, . . . and we organized here. When we went out, at that time, we didn't have the leadership of labor. They went out on strike, because the plants were down -- there was slack. The recession was in. So the textile workers in Madison, Skowhegan, Waterville, Oakland and Dexter. -- We went to a convention in New York in 1934, that was under the AFL. So 1934, we had a general strike here. The woolen factories came out, they weren't working, so there was no problem. It was on the day after Labor Day."

"Probably heard of the "flying squadron"; we'd take workers from one group who were out on strike and picket the other mills and get them out on strike. So from that we were successful in shutting down in Sangerville, Skowhegan, Old Town; in fact, we got all the woolen mills in the area. That was the first and second week of the strike."

"On September 10, that was election day, we had a democratic governor, Brann, who had been elected two years prior -- came in when Roosevelt did. He was the first democratic governor in I don't know how many years. Well, September 10, we had a 'flying squadron' that went into Lewiston to come out, then Augusta, then Brunswick. These were all cotton locals. Herein the north we were in woolen mostly."

"That Monday, we went to the Lockwood, which wasn't organized, with a 'flying squadron.' We went there, and we were around the gates, --you know how they picket, and we were successful for awhile. The people didn't get to work that day."

"The next day, they put in state troopers. The state troopers came out with large billy clubs, and they had some tear gas. There were more people on the sides watching the pickets than there were picketers. Somebody in that crowd threw a stone into the plant, because some of the people were going in.

That started, what we'd call, a minor skirmish."

"So a lot of the pickets and people who weren't in the strike went in and ran through the mills; so all the people came out. The state troopers got all together, and they fired tear gas into the crowd. They fired it, and it went against them and knocked them out."

"So out of nowhere, our governor then, who was a democrat, -and we had sent our people and voted for him-, he called out the militia all over the state. So they had a militia here - a militia in Lewiston. . ."

"And you'd find out in all our textile plants, they were French. They had a sense of organization. When I went into Lewiston and into Biddeford, you had the St. Jean Baptiste and so on. Among themselves they had organization; and once you got them together, and they understood the issue, they were very strong."

"So we were out on strike for about four weeks. The union had no money, we got by on what we had. We finally settled it, the general strike. They set up what they call a textile commission. Told everyone to go back to work, and the company was supposed to take everyone back. Our biggest problem was that they wouldn't take people back, all the plants including the Lockwood. . .The places we picketed during '34 and were successful in getting them out and then signing them up -- we had a hearing in Biddeford on that situation, that they (those who signed) were being discriminated against and they should be given their jobs back. . .The Lockwood, in the meantime, we had a hearing there, but we could never organize the Lockwood."

". . .There were some 'scabs!' That's what I always told management -- you open your plant and let them go in to work. Those that go in will never live it down. It will always come up. They don't forget!

". . .Conditions at the Lockwood weren't bad compared to other mills. What they did was keep people content by giving them the same conditions (as organized

mills) only a little less. They were fearful that if they gave them more than in other plants; it was a sign of organization, -didn't want them running to unions. . .For all the factories, they wanted seniority!"

". . .And the girls wanted for once to know that nobody could fool around with them, pat them on the behind, without getting fired. That was one of the biggest things among the women. It's what they call sexual harassment now. I mean, what were they going to do! You'd say no, and he's going to fire you or give you the worst work. A lot of women, you ask them now, out of pride, they'd say 'no'.<sup>\*</sup> And where is it prevalent? Where there's no union!"

"The abuses are simple! Seniority is one of the bases! Boss was a boss. He did what he felt like!"

Mr. Jabar's account points out, first the failure to unionize the Lockwood, second that the French were prevalent in the unions that did succeed such as the Wyandotte Worsted, third that the most important abuse in unorganized plants was that there was no way to redress grievances against the bosses.

In his account, he states that the strike ended after about four weeks with the creation of a Textile Labor Relations Board. This board was the result of a plan proposed by the Roosevelt-backed Wenant Mediation board. On July 21st, the Waterville Morning Sentinel reported the plan proposed by the mediation board:

Creation of a Textile Labor Relations Board for the 'more adequate protection of labor's rights under the collective bargaining and other labor provisions of the code.

A study by the Labor Department and the Federal Trade Commission to determine whether increased wages are economically feasible.

Regulation of the stretchout -- the practice of increasing the number of machines tended by individual workers -- by a second board acting under the Textile Labor Board.

An investigation by the labor department to settle the question of differentials between minimum wages prescribed by the code and the compensation of skilled workers.

. . .at the same time we request the employers in the industry to take back the workers now on strike without discrimination.<sup>40</sup>

This proposal along with President Roosevelt's appeal to strikers to return to work pending mediation did bring many of the strikers back to work. On September 21, 1934, "the Lockwood Cotton Mill in Waterville, scene of earlier disorders, saw 185 operatives return to work."<sup>41</sup>

As indicated in Jabar's account, the Morning Sentinel reported that as "hundreds of Central Maine strikers prepare to return to work", some of the mills will use discriminatory policies for rehiring. The newspaper reported that Jabar stated on September 23, that

I have received reports that the Lockwood Mill of Waterville, the Milliken Mill of Pittsfield and the American Woolen of Vassalboro will refuse to take back striking workers Monday morning. I believe that the Wyandotte Worsted Mill of this city is the only one in Maine which promises to take back every worker without discrimination.<sup>42</sup>

The oral accounts of the Franco-Americans also stated that the factory did not take back many of the strikers, like the Railroad in 1922. Most of those who went back to work found the conditions to have changed little. The unity, that had been hoped for, between the well organized woolen textile mill, i.e. the Wyandotte Worsted where many Franco-Americans were employed, and the unorganized cotton textile mill, i.e. the Lockwood Cotton Mill which also employed a majority of Frenchmen, failed in creating one strong, local textile union. This unity would never be achieved, since the Lockwood finally shut down in 1955, closing its gates because of southern competition and managements unwillingness to deal with the strikers of the strike of 1955. Within a year after this attempt to organize the Lockwood failed amidst the "worst riot" the city had ever seen, the 1935 Industrial Survey made this fatuous statement about labor conditions:

For the most part there is little trouble between industries and labor. Wages are up with the average in the state, living conditions are above the average compared to New England's leading industrial communities, and generally the relationship between employer and employee is cordial.<sup>43</sup>

Within two years, another industry would experience a strike and the formation of a labor union. The strike would be for better wages and working conditions and for the formation of a union.

In 1937, the C. F. Hathaway was the scene of a walkout by female stitchers and male cutters. This strike had familiar figures in it, Franco-Americans and George Jabar. The issue was the right to form a union that the company would recognize as the sole collective bargaining agency. The dispute focused upon the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the C. F. Hathaway under the presidency of Ellerton Jette and E. K. Leighton.

Indications of trouble at the shirt factory were reported early in April, 1937. The C. F. Hathaway were given 48 hours to recognize the Amalgamated on April 4, 1937. The Morning Sentinel reported that

A decision to strike, should the C. F. Hathaway Co., shirt manufacturers, decide not to recognize the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America as the sole collective bargaining agency of the employees, was reached last night at a closed meeting in Union Hall, according to an announcement made to the press by Miss Griselda Kuhlman of New York, organizer of the Amalgamated. Action of the employees yesterday followed a Saturday conference at the Hathaway plant in which the shirt factory officials were given 48 hours to decide on recognition. Their answer will be made at 6 o'clock tonight by E. K. Leighton, treasurer and principal owner. Should tonight's decision be against recognition of the Amalgamated, a mass meeting of employees will be held at Union Hall to map out a program for the strike which would be called for Tuesday morning.<sup>44</sup>

Mr. Leighton, on behalf of the C. F. Hathaway, refused to recognize the Amalgamated. The strike was called. On April 6, 1937, pickets surrounded the Appleton Street plant as police were called in to keep it orderly. By April 7, the union was claiming that 200 workers were off duty and that production was

crippled. Ellerton Jette claimed that 200 of 302 workers were still at work.<sup>45</sup> These conflicting reports on the number of workers who had joined the union ranks would prevail.

The picketing was generally orderly. Excepting an incident when Martin Letourneau, a local striker, was arrested for booing workers<sup>46</sup> as they left work at the end of the day, and the "removal of pickets from the side walk on the north side of Appleton Street to the walk on the south side so as not to interfere with employees as they came from the factory,"<sup>47</sup> the picketing was "orderly with the girls in the picket line singing songs as workers came from the plant."<sup>48</sup>

By the end of the first week of striking, little had changed. Both sides made claims of gains in their numbers. There were attempts to get the state troopers called off; there were charges that Letourneau's arrest was a case of intimidation. The picketers remained orderly and quiet. The Morning Sentinel reported,

With the first week of the strike at an end; Hathaway officials and the CIO do not appear moved on their separate demands. The strike was called Tuesday morning on a program which called for a \$13 minimum wage, 40-hour week, and union recognition. The Hathaway Monday offered employees a 10 percent wage increase and a 45-hour work week which has been in operation during the period of the strike.<sup>49</sup>

The next week would be the test of whether or not the workers would show up, especially the highly skilled cutters, since as Kuhlman stated "we know that the factory cannot operate with five cutters. It is costing them money each day."<sup>50</sup>

The next week of the strike, the cutters did not return, but the union and Jette made claims of gains in their ranks. The newspaper reports generally favored Jette's reports that there were only 85 out of 302 workers on strike.<sup>51</sup> The banter over gains and losses continued. The issue, in the second week, was

the same, the recognition of the Amalgamated as sole collective bargainer.

On April 14, the issue took a remarkable twist, one that surprised both factory and union leaders alike.

"Nearly 200 employees of the C. F. Hathaway Co., who had either refused to join the strike movement or had joined and then returned to their work, opened a personal struggle against the CIO and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America yesterday when a committee representing them, appeared before Hathaway Company officials and asked for recognition of their own organization known as the Waterville Shirt Makers Association."<sup>52</sup>

It "came like a bombshell"<sup>53</sup> to Kuhlman and the Amalgamated. Under the Wagner Act which replaced the NRA clause on collective bargaining, the employees had the right to have a secret vote on their preferences among unions; 199 of them voted for the local union.<sup>54</sup>

On Saturday, April 17, 1937, the Waterville Morning Sentinel reported the following:

Approximately 200 employees of the C. F. Hathaway Company, late yesterday afternoon renounced all connections and affiliations with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the CIO as they met in Elks Hall to perfect the Waterville Shirt Makers Association, an organization formed by working employees at the shirt factory. The meeting of this new association came less than an hour after President E. M. Jette of the Hathaway had announced to them a five percent wage increase and a 40 hour week effective with the start of work next Monday morning. These events put into the background for the day, at least, efforts of the Amalgamated to unionize the Hathaway employees, about a hundred of whom are out on strike.<sup>55</sup>

Miss Kuhlman of the Amalgamated claimed that the higher wages and lower hours were the result of union efforts. The Hathaway was still picketed by men and women loyal to the national union, while 200 or so others elected officers from the different departments for their local union which they claimed was not a company union.<sup>56</sup>

On the 20th, Jette threatened to seek an injunction against the national union's strikers, but the next day the Hathaway was picketed. The following day the Waterville Morning Sentinel reported an alleged battle between a woman

striker and a "loyal woman worker."<sup>57</sup> That same day 199 strikers returned to work and signed in favor of the Association; most of these local union members and officers were Franco-Americans as were the strikers for the national union. The next day, the strike was settled as the Association and the Amalgamated signed an agreement. This was not a final defeat of the Amalgamated. By working with the employees ranks, the association was voted out of existence by the employees, and the Amalgamated was voted in in 1945.

The oral accounts expressed a more positive attitude about the desire upon the part of the Franco-American employees to strike and to unionize. In discussing the Hathaway strike of 1937, Fernande Bernier and Erma Poirier revealed their attitude towards the strike and the reasons for unionizing.

Erma: "We all went on strike. We all did."

Question: But Mr. Jette kept saying in the newspaper accounts that the people kept working?

Fernande: "No, no, no. . .The bosses kept working, but the other people were out. We weren't making anything and the conditions weren't good, and if we wanted to better ourselves, we went on strike. My gosh, you'd go in and work two or three hours, but you had to stay all day.\*"

Erma: "It was better after the strike."

Fernande: "Oh, yes, it was much, much better. This was the idea -- why, some girls (before the strike) would work quite a lot, while others never got any work.

There used to be an empty lot across from the Hathaway on Appleton Street. You'd walk (picket) around there. People didn't have cars like today; you'd just walk along there."

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\* She's talking about the slack in the production.

Question: The newspapers say that they wouldn't allow you to sing, did you?

Fernande: "Oh yes we sang! If we had something against the Hathaway, we'd sing. We'd have our arms behind us and sing, "We will not be moved." Oh yes, we sang! A lot of people didn't watch though."

Erma: "It wasn't like it is now with a strike."

Fernande: "The first days maybe people came and watched, but other than that I don't think they ever did. They knew we were on strike."

Mr. Jabar was the one that did most of the talking. There was also a woman there, I don't remember her name.\*"

Question: What about police interference and calling in the state police - the newspapers mention this?

Fernande: "We didn't have any trouble like that."

Erma: "I don't remember that, seems that we didn't have any trouble."

Fernande: "I don't remember that. I remember one time, they wanted to ship an order out, and they didn't let them ship that order out. Well, two or three of the boys would have had to go in to ship it."

When we first went on strike, they said we were all going to lose our jobs."

Erma: "Nobody did lose their job."

Question: Why did the employees join the local union and not the Amalgamated?

Fernande: "At first it was the local union."

Question: "Why the change in 1945?"

Fernande: "Because the local union -- you were not protected by the state or by the government. The bosses could get around it, and they can do what they want to do. But when you belong to the national, you were protected by the outside."

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\* Miss Kuhlman

Question: Why the local first?

Fernande: "Because no one around here had ever heard of the national.

After awhile they learnt they'd get better protection."

Erma: "That's true. I remember the local union didn't like us joining the Amalgamated."

Question: Was the Amalgamated better?

Fernande: "Of course!"

Erma: "Of course, we got better protection!"

Fernande: "We didn't get the raise to \$13 at the time from the union (local), but from the NRA. That was President Roosevelt's."

Erma: "They had to pay us \$13."

Fernande: "They didn't at first, but after awhile they had to."

Erma: "Oh my gosh, we thought we were making a lot of money!"

This account pointed out that many of the French wanted to unionize, and that once they understood the situation, i.e., the better protection, the national provided, they were willing to join. They did not portray the economic difficulties of the time, although many of the Hathaway strikers had to rely upon relief provided by the Wyandotte union members. This support from the woolen textile union helped many of the Hathaway strikers, most of whom were women doing a very "unfemale" thing, endure the weeks of the strike. As Jabar stated earlier in dealing with the local factories, the Hathaway gave the workers just enough to keep them from joining the national unions at the time. Unlike the MCRR and the Lockwood after their strikes, the Hathaway did take all the workers back.

George Jabar was also present at this strike, conferring with Miss Kuhlman on the situation, speaking with the employees and with management, and helping to attain relief for the workers. Although he views the 1937 strike as a loss,

he views the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America as being much more successful than the textile unions. The Amalgamated was successful in 1945 and has been the sole collective bargainer ever since. Many of its local leaders are Franco-Americans. The textile unions eventually failed, but not because of the Franco-American's reluctance to unionize. As George Jabar states in this excerpt on the Hathaway strike, the Amalgamated and the textile unions, it was an economic problem.

George Jabar:

"I was in that Hathaway strike. In 1937 we tried to organize there. We had a strike, and we lost the strike. They voted in an independent union."

"So, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, of course they knew how to work. They worked from the top; they eventually made the independent union become part of the Amalgamated. Incidentally, the Amalgamated is my union now. It contains in one union, in different sections, the shoes and the textile. But they have their own local union and their own set up."

"For the Hathaway, they wanted more wages, better conditions. They wanted to organize. They were getting better wages, like the cutters. They were making much better than in Massachusetts or anywhere else. Oh, they were below the union scale. Then they (the Amalgamated) finally got them, they worked through the top. The Independent Union voted to go with the Amalgamated Union in 1945."

"The Amalgamated clothing industry was 90% organized, something we could never get in textiles. See down South -- that's why the textile industry is gone up here; you don't have very much in the north. If we were ever able to organize the textile industry like the Amalgamated, we'd have been more successful, but I don't know if we'd been able to save the plants. It was an economic problem."

"Textiles are done! When we used to have 340 textile plants in Fall River, New Bedford; you probably have only one or two now. The only woolens you have that are outstanding now are the Wyandotte, Corina and Clinton. We had about 24,000 to 30,000 textile workers by the time I came up. Now there's practically nothing!"

"Down south was way ahead of us. Why would they come up here? The weather is fine, you're near your product, the cotton fields. What they're doing now in Maine, advertising their business potentials; they've been doing that down South for fifty years! They've been giving tax breaks down there for fifty years! Now the South's problem is the imports from outside."

This southern trend that caused a textile depression in the northeast affected mills as large as the Amoskeag to the smaller mills as the Lockwood. These textile concerns that attracted many of the French-Canadians looking for jobs to their towns never provided the sense of economic security and the sense of unity need for the French to be upwardly mobile within their confines. Having survived the textile depression and the national depression and the local prejudice, the Franco-Americans of Waterville moved into the more "secure" industries such as the expanding C. F. Hathaway and the Scott Paper Company formerly the Hollingsworth & Whitney, both of whom doubled the size of their employee pool. Another trend was the Franco-American movement into other occupations such as the professions.

The supposedly "docile" French were the strikers throughout these three strikes. There were other ethnic groups represented, but the Franco-Americans formed the majority in all industries that struck in this city. Much of the failure to unionize prior to 1940 was due to the failure on the part of the labor leaders representing the workers nationally. The economic times did not keep. The MCRR strike of 1922 kept the workers out from their jobs for three

months; many of these strikers were financially strapped. During the textile strike of 1934, Mayor Jackson of Waterville expressed concerns over the devastating effects the strike could have on the city that was already experiencing the effects of the depression and unemployment. The C. F. Hathaway strike was partially the result of the depression, like the textile industries, production was down and to keep a pace with the times, many industries required the workers to take on extra hours, take a cut in wages, and to work more machines. As a result, the employees struck using the new labor laws enacted under Roosevelt to their fullest. The strikes indicated the Franco-American's willingness to improve their lot. Their full support for Roosevelt, the New Deal, and labor legislation in a notably Republican state is not a sign of their being "docile."

The period prior to the 1940's marked the ups and downs of organized labor. After 1940, Maine's industries experienced a great number of successful attempts at unionization. Locally, the C. F. Hathaway, the Hollingsworth & Whitney, and the Maine Central Railroad to name a few became members of national unions. World War II, the assimilation of many of the Franco-Americans after the war, and the economic booms of the post war period, the 1950's and the 1960's, brought the Franco-Americans to levels of achievement and of acceptance that prior to the 1940's would have been generally unheard of. The economic toll's gripe of the period prior to the 1940's was broken after World War II, and the Franco-Americans not only moved between the industries of Waterville but began to make steps upwards within the industries as they had in politics, private business and the professions.

## PART IV

### CONCLUSION

Economic recessions, financial insecurity, prejudice and cultural barriers were the hurdles that the Franco-Americans of Waterville had to overcome throughout the period from 1890 to 1940. These hurdles have never been completely erased from the reality of their day to day life, although the Franco-Americans adapted, adjusted and changed with each decade. Their "adaptions" to the labor market have focused on three types of adjustments. The first "adjustment", which was accelerated by the economic recessions of the 1920's and 1930's, was inter-industrial labor mobility. The second and third adjustments were the result of local prejudice, of the desire of the Franco-Americans to achieve their economic ambitions, and of their ethnic community's need for their own services. These trends were first, the operation of Franco-American owned businesses, most notably grocery stores, and second, the movement of the Franco-Americans into the professions.

Waterville's variety of industries, unlike the "single industry" towns such as Manchester, New Hampshire, provided the background for the movement between industries, a movement that also decreased the unity needed for labor organizations to succeed. The interviews on the conditions of the Lockwood, the C. F. Hathaway and the MCRR generally provided the view of workers who remained in the industries for a number of years. However, Waterville's labor pool also consisted of many workers who were "temporarily" employed. Construction was one industry that employed many workers on a temporary basis.<sup>1</sup> Other places of business that provided some of the temporary employment were local stores, domestic service, small foundries, lumber camps, farms on the outskirts of the town, laundries, and the peddling of merchandise.\* Some had to seek employment

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\* All these forms and places of business were temporary forms of employment for Franco-Americans from Waterville who were interviewed.

in other towns especially during the depression.

Financial challenges faced Francos at the onset of the Depression of the 1930's. 'Last hired, first to be fired' was sometimes an apt description of their plight. Because many lacked formal education and sophisticated training, their menial positions were often temporarily broken up when the father would leave one community to seek work in another whose mills were not laying off.<sup>2</sup>

In Waterville, this trend meant that brothers, sisters and fathers would sometimes separate from the family to seek work in another community. In the interviews it appears that most of the Franco-Americans moved to jobs within the city and, as a last resort, they went to look for jobs in other communities, usually in Maine. The areas most commonly mentioned were Augusta, Lewiston, and Biddeford, areas that all boasted large Franco-American populations and textile mills. Another inner-state "migration" was the result of the moving of "gravel gangs" used by the MCRR to repair and to construct the railroad beds and rails. The majority of those interviewed stated that their own relatives and friends stayed within the city to look for employment during the depression. One man interviewed worked during the 1930's at a local foundry, at a grocery store, on the MCRR "gravel gangs", upon local construction jobs, in a lumber camp, and doing odd jobs such as cutting and selling wood.<sup>3</sup> Others who were layed off from the Lockwood, for instance, sought work at the Keyes Fibre Comapny, the Wyandotte Worsted Co., or the Hollingsworth & Whitney. This trend of inter-industrial mobility because of economic hardships was present in all the Franco-Americans' accounts.

The next type of labor mobility stands as an example of the Franco-Americans' ambitions and achievements but also stands as the result of the prejudice that shut the Franco-Americans from the upper echelons of local businesses owned and operated by Yankees. Franco-American after Franco-American insisted upon their noted working capabilities but also flatly stated that the top management positions in the local factories were closed to them. Robert Fournier's statement

about prejudice, exemplifies the feelings of many local French residents,

My father's feeling about any discrimination was that the French had to be twice as good to achieve anything. You had to put your entire heart and soul into it in order to succeed. And he did. He was taking English lessons at the same time he studied textiles - in French.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the local Franco-Americans acquired as much education as the family's financial situation allowed. Around the turn of the century, many Franco-Americans took night courses at the Redington Street School in Waterville.<sup>5</sup> Others attended parochial schools and some even graduated from the local public high schools.\* Some who didn't finish school but went into mill work still went on to be successful in their own businesses. Napoleon Marcou's father ran a grocery store around the turn of the century, Fredrick Cyr was a successful contractor in the early 1900's, Fernande Bernier's father, Archie, ran a grocery store and went into construction during the depression. The interviews have numerous examples of such successful men.

R. S. Lawton's book, Franco-Americans of the State of Maine, U.S.A., and their Achievements, published in 1915, lists nine men who were excellent examples of the mobility that has been discussed in this paper. All, but one, are examples of Franco-American men who went into private business in various circumstances. Octave Pelletier, born in the province of Quebec in 1848, ran a dry goods store from 1882 to 1900.<sup>6</sup> Joseph E. Lachance, who was educated in Waterville's public schools and who had been a shoe clerk for twenty years, became an "astute business man" founding "the spacious and finely stocked store of Simpson & Lachance, Men's Outfitters."<sup>7</sup> Joseph Ferland, born in 1872, came to Waterville at the age of 13 years and obtained his first employment in the Lockwood mills, remaining three years. He then

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\* There was not a Catholic High School for boys, but Mount Merici Academy provided a high school education for Catholic girls for most of the twentieth century.

engaged in the lumber industry, continuing twelve years, and then for six years was proprietor of a restaurant. Mr. Ferland gained further business experience by conducting a livery stable for seven years, afterwards, or in March, 1912, he established his present highly reputable drug store.<sup>8</sup>

John Raymond, born in Quebec in 1873, was an interior decorator and an extensive dealer in paints and wall coverings.

Subsequent to his school days in his native town, Mr. Raymond at the age of 15 years, came to Waterville and learned the trade of painting largely through his own exertions and an ambition to gain advancement through the medium of that business. After working three years in the M.C. Railroad car shops, Mr. Raymond established himself in business as at present.<sup>9</sup>

John Pilottes career was summarized as follows:

In 1890 he came to Waterville, securing employment in the famous Lockwood Mills. . . Concluding that he had enough experience in the textile industry Mr. Pilotte, in 1901, established his present largely stocked and well patronized variety store, an enterprise that proved successful from the first.<sup>10</sup>

Charles Pomerleau, born in Waterville in 1868, was an excellent example of a mobile Franco-American. The account of his career reads as follows:

Mr. Pomerleau's first employment was in the Lockwood Mills where he remained five years. He then engaged in the lumber industry, continuing five years, and then embarked in the grocery business in which he has been altogether for twenty-five years. . . Previous to these store enterprises Mr. Pomerleau worked further in the textile industry in Lewiston, being employed in the Androscoggin, Barker and Hill Mills for one year.

The others who were listed by Lawton were A. A. Verville, born in Waterville in 1889, who "obtained his early education in the parochial schools of his native city and that relative to dentistry;"<sup>12</sup> Joseph Bourque who was first employed as a laborer, then established a jewelry business, and who was a member of the 77 Legislature;<sup>13</sup> and finally, John Berube, who "having been denied the advantage of school. . . educated himself and established his own bakery in Waterville in 1910."<sup>14</sup> All nine men "adapted" to their situation and became successful in private business.

This movement of Franco-Americans into private enterprises located for the most part in French neighborhoods was stressed in Albert Fecteau's unpublished masters thesis on the French. In his appendix he listed the French-owned business that existed from 1900 to 1951. For businesses in operation around 1900, Fecteau lists 48 French owned and operated businesses.<sup>15</sup> His next list comprised of "business firms added within the next 20 years"; there were twenty-eight in all.<sup>16</sup> The final list compiled by Fecteau was of "enterprises under 'French' management or ownership - 1951." The list is twelve pages long and it includes accountants, auditors, automobile dealers, barbers, constructors, electrical contractors, excavating, florists, grocers, insurance, opticians, real estate, theatre, etc.<sup>17</sup> Unluckily there was not a list of French businesses that closed during the depression since many Franco-Americans stated that quite a few went through bankruptcy.

These businesses arose for various reasons. Obviously, one was the need for these services by Waterville's large Franco-American community. Another reason for the proliferation of private businesses was that they provided the medium for many Franco-Americans to realize their financial ambitions since their own ethnic group acted as the base of their market, but this stress on Franco-American private businesses as proof of their success and acceptance must be tempered by the fact that "interest in commercial self-employment was also a plain response to a discriminatory opportunity structure which precluded wage or salary employment at non-menial levels."<sup>18</sup> All sources indicated that French ambitions only blossomed in French enterprises in French neighborhoods prior to the 1940's, but especially from 1890 to 1930. Within the promotional structure of the mills and the railroads, opportunities for advancement were closed to Franco-Americans.

The other areas that they moved into were the professions or the religious orders. This movement into the professions accelerated during the depression when business conditions were not good and during later periods when educational opportunities were not hindered by the Franco-American's financial status. Cal Cyr Wilmot of Waterville was a school teacher who was "forced" to work in a one room school house in the country during the depression, because, as she stated, the local public schools would not hire a Catholic.<sup>19</sup> Her older sister, Sister Lucille Cyr, joined the Ursuline order to become a French and music teacher.<sup>20</sup> Napoleon Marcou set up his law practice in 1919 after studying law at the University of Maine.<sup>21</sup> Roland Poulin, a graduate of Colby College and of Georgetown University Law School, set up his law practice in 1935, at a time that he describes as marked by job scarcity and by starving families.<sup>22</sup> When the French residents were questioned about members of their community, the local doctors came to mind, but the most commonly cited professional was F. Harold Dubord, a local lawyer who became the first Franco-American mayor of Waterville in 1931. One Franco-American professional stated that it was not unusual for a family to have among its members, one or two professionals while the rest were employed by local industries.<sup>23</sup> The professions were the other areas in which the Franco-Americans could "express their ambitions", in which they could render services necessary to their community, and in which they could represent their ethnic group in the city's politics and social hierarchy.

The Franco-American community in Waterville developed rapidly from the thrust of the economic boom started by the Lockwood in 1874 until its decline that was noticeable in the 1920's. This early stage of the French community's development, 1890 - 1920, was marred by the job insecurity of "last hired, first fired" and the abuses of the factory owners such as child labor, long hours and low wages. When the Franco-Americans began to prosper as a community

most noticeably in the growth in the number of ethnic businesses, the building of churches and parochial schools, and the establishment of a professional group, they were hit by the textile depression, from the 1920's on, and the national depression of the 1930's. The depressions fostered unemployment, cuts in wages, and financial insecurity for the majority. However, the prejudice and the economic depressions they faced only hindered their progress, they did not stop from striking for better conditions, from moving between industries, from becoming private businessmen, and from becoming professionals. The Franco-American labor force of Waterville from 1890 to 1940 was adaptable, industrious, and by no means "inherently" docile. Their efforts throughout the first half of the twentieth century created the base for labor organizations, for political success, and for the social and the economic achievements of the present Franco-American community.

## NOTES: Introduction

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