

**Interview with Miss Lura and Miss Mary Frederick
Interviewed by Bill Harvey**

**Interviewed on July 10, 1979
at Miss Frederick's home on Clipper Road in Hampden-Woodberry,
Baltimore, MD
for the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project**

Mary Frederick – MF

Lura Frederick – LF

Bill Harvey – BH

BH: This interview for the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project with Miss Lura and Miss Mary Frederick, was conducted by Bill Harvey on July 10, 1979, at Miss Frederick's home on Clipper Road in Hampden-Woodberry.

BH: Miss Lura, Miss Mary, you told me that your parents came to Hampden and then moved to Minnesota before you all were born. Can you describe to me why they went back to Minnesota?

MF: I told you. My mother's sister married a man who had homesteaded out there. She went there because her sister was out there and her two brothers had gone also. The brothers were kind of wild and Grandmother went to straighten them out. So, she went too. After they went there, my father moved there and we were all born out there.

BH: So you were born out there and then you came back to Hampden-Woodberry. You all distinguish between Hampden and Woodberry?

MF: Yes. I never lived in Hampden. [Laughter]

BH: Once before, though, Miss Mary, you told me though, that you make that distinction just joking around.

MF: Well, it is. It carries as a joke, but deep, rooted down, it really isn't a joke.

BH: Okay, but then, you came back to Woodberry in 1924.

MF: Yes.

BH: 1925; you went to school for a couple of years—

MF: I went to work.

BH: Then, you both went to work at the Best Cone Company?

MF: Yes; not at the same time. I followed her footsteps.

LF: I was twenty-six and you were twenty-seven—twenty-eight.

MF: Twenty-eight.

BH: How did you get that job over there?

MF: I went down and applied for it.

LF: You lied about your age. [All laugh]

MF: Everybody in Woodberry and Hampden worked at that ice cream cone plant, when it opened up. Every girl in Hampden and Woodberry was the same age; from fourteen to sixteen. You had to be sixteen before you went to work.

BH: They never checked you out on that, though?

MF and LF: No.

LF: But I just worked from there until, before Christmas. I was down there in 1925, because I went to Hooper's in 1926. I was fifteen.

BH: What kind of work did you all do at the Cone Company?

MF: We packed ice cream cones. I was floor lady when I was fourteen. Of course, I was the only one who could keep time. The rest of them didn't know how to keep time.

BH: What do you mean, "keep time"?

MF: Well, they would say it was quarter to ten instead of nine forty-five. They didn't know how to mark the time down, like we count it at Wood Camp. So, I used to do mine, and then, my girlfriend worked daytime and I used to do hers. She had it written down the way you would say "quarter of ten". Then, I'd have to go over her sheets and mark her time down the way we do our time sheets.

BH: That was down in the basement of the Park Mill?

LF: They had the whole building. They used the top for the warehouse. Then they had the bottom [unclear]. The front part was where they packed vegetables and the bakery was in the back.

BH: Remember how much money you made?

LF: Nine dollars a week for six nights a week; from three to eleven.

BH: Was that the same?

MF: No. By the time I went, I was raised to eleven dollars a week for the same time; but eleven dollars a week.

BH: You work three to eleven, too?

LF: Right.

BH: Why did you leave that job?

LF: Well, my aunt told me that my father was getting older; he was fifty years old--

MF: Oh no, he wasn't.

LF: No, he wasn't fifty. He must have been--

MF: Forty-five.

LF: Forty-five, forty-six years old and he was getting old and more money needed to be brought in. So, I had to get a job and get more money. So, I went to work at Hooper's for fifty-five hours a week, for thirteen dollars and five cents.

MF: Of course, that was the starting wage. What you did was mark a load that would be better than sweeping. When I was sixteen I went on to the machines.

BH: Did you go to work at Hooper's at the same time?

MF: That she did? No, no. We're really not twins. We might look like twins. I worked and then it became seasonal work, around October. When the ice cream season was over, they would close down. They had enough stocked if you wanted ice cream cones. They had them there, but they only ran the machines during the summer months. I went there when I was fifteen because I was sixteen before I went to Hooper's in October of the same year, 1928. I went because the Best Cones had closed for the season, and [unclear]

LF: You worked there until 1961.

MF: Right.

BH: Both of you worked there until 1961?

LF: Until they closed down the preparatory department. You were off one week and I was off three weeks.

MF: We were on temporary layoff but they called us down to Mount Vernon. I said, “Well suppose I don’t want the job?” He says, “Well, I have to call the unemployment folk and tell them you refused to take the job.” “I figured I was on temporary layoff.” He said, “I still have to call down to unemployment because I offered you a job.” Well, I said, “I’ll come to work, then.” So, I never did go back to Hooper’s because I had a better job down there at Mount Vernon. After they closed the preparatory department, I started in the sewing room and I was petrified of those sewing machines. Every time I put my foot down to start that thing up; it was a power machine and I would stand straight up. So, when they called me down to Mount Vernon for the same kind of work, I went down there and she followed.

BH: You mean, the man down at Mount Vernon told you he was going to call the unemployment office on you?

MF and LF: He said he would have to.

MF: He said he would have to report me because this was a job making twelve dollars a week more than I was making at Hooper’s. It was a better job with a better payment. Well, I was a little leery. I didn’t like that job at Hooper’s, but after thirty-three years, I was a little timid to leave it to go down there. But after the first or second week that I was down there—maybe a month—I was well satisfied, that I had changed jobs.

BH: Was there really any chance that you would get your job back at Hooper’s?

MF: Yes, definitely. I could have demanded. It was a temporary layoff, but we could have gone back there and Mr. Hooper would have seen that we were placed because we were thirty-three and thirty-six years’ seniority. And he sort of did look out for the seniority if the boss laid you off [unclear]. I had only been off one week. Well, I didn’t care for the job I had up there then. It was below my dignity because I had come down from eighty dollars a week, down to...

LF: Fifty.

MF: About fifty dollars. About thirty dollars a week drop in salary [unclear] 1961.

BH: How did that happen?

MF: Well, see, they closed down the department we worked in. If they close down the department you work in and you are seniority, and if they don’t find you a job in the same pay rate, they will give you a job with a thirty-dollar drop. I was making eighty dollars and went down to fifty dollars. Then, when I worked the first week at Mount Vernon, I made twelve dollars more and then, I just kept going up until the wages were over one hundred dollars a week.

LF: It was about the same with me, only I was off three weeks when I was down there. She was supposed to go on day work. We had worked day work [unclear] at Hooper’s, from seven until three-thirty. But down at Mount Vernon, they would put you on night work. They asked her if she would go on the second shift from three-thirty till twelve, but they had openings for me too, so I went down and...

MF: And they had something for us at Hooper’s but we wouldn’t go back... Well, you can’t blame us. We were making about twenty dollars a week more than I was making at Hooper’s.

LF: And then when Mount Vernon closed we were off a year. We didn’t know about Filterrite. We were off a year and then we went to Filterrite. They called and sent for

her. And then a month later she said to me, “Why don’t you go out and get a job?” I said, “I can’t get a job; I’m sixty-three years old. They won’t hire me.” Then, I went up there and got a job. They wanted us to leave and in two years they didn’t want us to go. But that’s a nice place to work, up there at Filterrite. I recommend to anybody who can get in there, that they ought to go, because it’s a good place to work.

MF: [unclear]...And that is what we call in the other mill; a hard twist, because it has so much twist it made the yarn, not harder, but stronger.

LF: The more twist you have, the stronger it is.

MF: That’s what they used to make at Hooper’s.

BH: Isn’t that synthetics up there, though; or is it cotton?

LF and MF: Yes.

LF: Well, Mount Vernon made synthetics; very little cotton.

MF: Hooper made strictly cotton.

BH: Some people say that’s why Hooper went under.

MF and LF: Why?

BH: Because he wouldn’t shift to synthetics.

[Confusion] [unclear]

LF: They tried every once in a while—

MF: to run fiberglass.

LF: Yes, they even tried to run fiberglass one time and, it just dropped on through. But they ran everything at Filterrite. They brought their fiberglass in but they never milled it. You name it and they ran everything else. And you wouldn’t believe the different color of whites that would go through. You could tell just by walking down the room what was on the machines after your eye was experienced. She was better at it than I was.

MF: What was it: nylon, or drylon...

LF: Raylon.

MF: Raylon, warlon, rayon and the different synthetics. And the machinist would be experienced. That’s why I say, these people who worked in the mill for two years didn’t know anything about the mill.

LF: Down at Mount Vernon, they ran polypropylene, which is plastic. They colored that so when it came out through the machine...What do they call that when the color doesn’t stay...?

BH: It’s like a dye?

MF: It’s a dye but it doesn’t stay. They have a name for it; when the work comes out, it’s identification color. Down at Mount Vernon they used to have some that ran pink. But that pink would automatically go out by the time it was through the mill.

LF: By then, it was processed.

MF: Processed through the mill. They made rugs out of this polypropylene. That plastic fiber has to be dyed in the first stages; it can’t be dyed after it’s made. Anything you see that has polypropylene, or plastic in it, is woven like this matting and these indoor/outdoor rugs, here. That’s what they were making those fibers for. It has to be colored as they’re making the plastic because it doesn’t take a dye.

BH: What was the one difference Miss Lura, you said, between Filterrite and Hooper’s? You said there was...

LF: They were more considerate. The bosses would listen to you at the Filterrite.

BH: But I—

LF: Is that what you meant?

BH: No, I meant in the mill process that you said had eliminated one machine.

LF: Oh, the drawing frame. It was between the card and the roving machine, where the work came off the cards. Then, drawing frame means to draw the work out. They would stretch it from one inch to maybe, four. It was more delivery to the stretching. It would make the work stronger. Yet, instead of the one coming in, you'd have four coming in from the back; go through the machine and then draw it out and go down into the counter that much stronger because it would be four into one.

BH: What was next?

LF: Then, it would go from there to the roving frame, which stretches even further--

MF: And it would put the first twist in.

BH: What were you going to say about the bosses up at Filterrite?

LF: They were much more considerate than the bosses at Hooper's. They would listen to you. The bosses from the bygone days didn't want to hear what you had to say, when it was something they should have considered. Whereas, at Filterrite, they would listen.

MF: Well, another thing; a lot of bosses in the old mills were once mill workers. They had worked themselves up to bosses. They didn't just bring somebody in. Maybe if they brought them in from the South, they still had to have started off at the bottom and worked themselves up to their job as boss.

BH: Do you think that makes a difference in the way bosses are, at Hooper's?

MF: I don't know. Those young men up at Filterrite; they were eager to learn what you had to tell them. Lura gave that picture to one of them down at the church. She hasn't received it back, yet.

LF: That one from the [Maryland] Historical Society does belong there. I've got his name in my pocket and I'm going to call him to see where my picture is.

MF: They were always eager. You had to take the papers into the office anyhow. They would talk to you and ask you to explain how things were back in those days. They were just as eager as people like you are, to learn how things started, because Filterrite had started in one of the big bosses' father's basement. He was the inventor of this filter. He had just started with this shop in his basement. The man wasn't any older than I am. Paul's father might have been...

LF: But they would listen to you if something was wrong and you were trying to tell them. Whereas, years ago, the bosses wouldn't listen to you.

BH: You think because the bosses at Hooper's had worked in the mill, they thought they knew more about it than you?

MF: Right, I think so. Maybe I'm wrong—

LF: One time, one of my machines had caught on fire. The gearbox was on fire and I stopped it and went up to the office. They were talking and I was going to butt into the conversation. I said, "Excuse me..." I wanted to tell him the machine was on fire. He said, "Young lady, will you wait till we're finished?" I said, "Alright, but the machine's on fire, over there." You had better believe they came out of the office. [Laughter]

BH: Who was that boss who told you to wait till—

LF: Mr. Willy. That was when I was first up there. It might not have hurt anything, but still, it could have hurt something. The gearbox was at the end of the machine and I heard the noise and lifted it up. I could see sparks and it was smoky inside. So, I stopped it and went and asked them. They even *passed* me, going back. But, some of them were considerate and some of them weren't. One time, one of the bosses up there, Mr. Phillips, wanted Mary and me to take a course in textiles—

MF: correspondence...

LF: He wanted us to take a correspondence course in textiles. My aunt was working up there—and this was the same one who had told me that I had to work because my father was getting old; forty-six. The boss said, "I'd like for the two girls to take a correspondence course in textiles." She said, "On no, they couldn't do that. I could do it, but they couldn't." Well, they weren't interested in her taking it; they were interested in her and me taking it. So, it just fell through...

MF: But a lot of them in Hooper's took textile correspondence courses. It was very popular for the bosses to take.

BH: for the bosses to take—

LF: We probably would have made it if she hadn't been ahead [unclear] when she said she could take it but we couldn't.

MF and LF: We must have been twenty.

BH: What did that do for you if you completed the course?

LF: Well, then you were eligible for a boss's job. Hooper went along with you. He was willing for whatever benefited you. Of course, you were benefiting him. Years ago, when we used to invent something [unclear] Hooper would say, "Do you want a pay raise or do you want a week's vacation? This one fellow invented something for the spinning frame. Hooper asked him, "Do you want a week's vacation or would you like a raise in your pay?" He said, "I took the week's vacation, because I didn't know how long that thing was going to work!"

[All laugh]

LF: He was sure that week's vacation would pay. But now, you find that when you go to work for a factory or anything in industry; you have to sign a contract—like we did at Filterrite--that anything you invent on company time belongs to the company.

BH: Did that happen to other people over at Hooper's?

LF: I don't know. A woman was telling me something about her father just a couple of weeks [unclear]. We were at a luncheon up at Friendly Farms, an Eastern Star luncheon. Her father had been a boss down at Mount Vernon. She said that he invented a time scale. I don't know exactly what it was, but you could write up time really quickly. She said the same thing; that if the bosses got up high after working in the mill all day; when they became useless, down the ladder they would go again, for what would be called--

MF and LF: Grading the work. They called it sizing.

LF: Sizing the work means you go on all the machines and get a certain amount of work off the machines. You go and test it and weigh it. Then, if the machine isn't making the right weight of material, you have to send a sheet. That's what I did at Filterrite. Now they call it "quality control". There used to be "inspectors", but they have the ritzy name of "quality control". That was their job when they were old. You couldn't afford to quit.

There was no pension plan. Hooper might have given a little pension. But, they realized that when they went down, the pay went down too. That's what their job was. I knew quite a few of them. A few ended up running an elevator or doing something—

MF and LF: They called it sizing work.

BH: That was a common pattern for bosses; to go up and then they came back down to those other jobs?

LF: Well, that's what you saw; not all.

BH: You said when they became useless—

LF: Well, it went like this. Somebody went up and you went down [when] somebody was smarter than you were.

LF and MF: Or younger—

LF: ...to hold the job down. You were getting older. These men were up in their seventies.

MF: They shouldn't have even been working, then.

LF: They shouldn't have.

MF: Some of them were older than seventy. One old man, I remember Mr. Metcalf. His leg was so bad, he must have had arthritis. But arthritis wasn't even something worried about in those days. He used to wear tennis shoes all the time and just shuffle along. He used to go back on the stairs where they didn't have [unclear] or where there were empty boxes and things; or the folds that they didn't use back then, and lay down there. One lunchtime he laid down there and we thought for sure he was dead. We went and got the nurse to come from the office to get him up. He used to have pencils. I used to have a couple around here. I gave one to my niece when she started school. I said, "This is what a man was using up at work." It was the eraser. He never made many mistakes because the eraser was almost perfect but that was the eraser and that was all that was left of that pencil. He had a lot of them like that, because I swiped that one for her.

LF: What did she tell you? Take it back?

MF: She said, "Aunt Mary, you better take that back because he might need it." I said, "Honey, he has quite a few just like this." But he was the one who we noticed the most because he was...

LF: You don't realize until you're sitting down, thinking; I wonder how degrading that job was; after being a boss over people and have to do a thing like that--

BH: Yes, you were talking about the bosses not listening to you when things came up. Mr. Hochschild told me that they had an efficiency expert named Santos over at Hooper Mills.

MF: Yes. Santos, or Santoss. Some called him Santoss. He was the first, [unclear]--

LF: He wouldn't listen to anybody.

BH: He wouldn't?

LF: No. This one fellow at church was telling me he had been working on the braiding machine. His name was Bill Tice. He had invented something for the braiding machine when he first started out. He was making twenty-one dollars a week and he asked Mr. Santos for a raise. He was going to get married and he wanted twenty-three dollars a week. Santos wouldn't give it to him--

LF: [Laughing] ...[unclear] afford a wife on two dollars!

MF: So he quit. There was another boss up there named—

LF: Mr. Edmond. He was very upset when Bill Tice quit because he was a good worker and he was an intelligent person. Santos wouldn't listen to anybody. We were talking about Mr. Santos.

BH: Yes, where are we on Mr. Santos?

LF: I was telling you about Bill Tice quitting because he was only making twenty-one dollars a week. Santos wouldn't give him a raise.

BH: Did you have contact with Santos?

LF: No, he was *Spanish*. He was a very, very cool person. I don't know of anybody who ever got close to him—

MF: He wasn't the type. He might say hello or good morning or something like that, but he wouldn't start a conversation—

LF: He always walked through the mill with his head down. He was a very tall person—

MF: But, he didn't miss much. He was there about five years.

LF: He realized that people didn't like him, because when he got really sick and they took up a collection and sent him flowers from the mill, he said, "I didn't think anybody ever noticed me." So, maybe it was just as much our fault as it was his fault for being the kind of person he was.

BH: Well, how could it have been your fault? Did you feel like he was kind of looking over your shoulder all the time?

LF: No, he thought he was better than I was. And I thought, "You think so, well, go ahead and think it, but I know you're not. You might be just as good as I am...but you're no better than I am, no matter who you are." [pause]

BH: We can't get that look on tape. [Laughing]

[All laughing]

LF: Can you *feel* it?

BH: I don't think there are words for it, either.

[All laughing]

LF: I told him that. I said, "You might think you're...better than I am, but you're not. You might be just as good." Then, we used to have trouble with the boss, who claimed we were prejudiced, racially prejudiced. I said, "What is wrong with your head? I'm not prejudiced racially. When I go to work in a place, I don't care whether a person is purple, green or what color they are. They're my co-workers; I don't see any color at all. I could see arrogance and nastiness, but I don't see color because that has nothing to do with it."

MF: How can you be racially prejudiced if you're from Minnesota? Some were down at the school with them; played with them when you were little, tiny kids—

LF: You lived next door to them. You didn't see anything.

End of Side One

Side Two

BH: How did that come up? I thought that Black people didn't work in the mills too much.

LF and MF: After the Second World War.

MF: [Laughter] What did Mr. Hooper say? He said what did they think about bring German prisoners of war into the mill. Oh my golly...

LF: That's all we needed. The president of the union said, "If you give us a raise, we'll let you bring the prisoners of war in." He [Mr. Hooper] used some choice words. He wasn't going to bring the prisoners and then, they weren't going to get the raise.

MF: But, we all had somebody in the service, either fighting in the Pacific or over in Europe and we didn't want any prisoners of war. And the colored people started coming in; at first they weren't working.

LF: Wasn't it a sort of thing that they would send them in? I don't know where they came from, or how they got there. It must have been state employments service that sent them there.

BH: I don't know.

LF: I can't—

MF: But we had a lot from the South; from North Carolina and South Carolina who came up here.

BH: I heard that Hooper's would take buses down there and bring people up by the busloads...

LF: I don't know whether there were [unclear]—

MF: That was the *First* World War—

LF: No. But they would go down and talk to you. They would probably have to go down and open up an employment office and whether or not they would pay the bus fares, I don't know.

MF: I had heard something about that but I never heard the details about it.

LF: Well, now, when Mount Vernon closed, one boss asked if you and I would like to go down and work in the southern mills. I said, "No, because it'd be too far to commute!" [Laughter] No way would I go live down South.

MF: We'd never been any further south than Front Royal, Virginia. I don't have any desire to go South. I'd rather go from one work [unclear] New England, or some place and go to work, but work *first*.

BH: Well, did the mill seem to change when people started to come in from the South?

LF and MF: Yes.

BH: ...during the time of the Second World War?

LF: There's a comparison that they would always tell you; how much money they made down South. Well, what were they doing up here, working in Mount Vernon at Hooper's if they were making all this money down in the southern mills? That's my estimation. And they had a system down in the southern mills. If you were rowdy, if you stayed out, if you caused trouble in the department you worked in, or if you were just bad influence—

MF: or didn't work steadily—

LF: or didn't work steadily, especially if you didn't work steadily, you would get blackballed. But you had a file. You would go from one mill to the other down there, but your file would follow you. And, it got to the point where no one in the southern mills would hire you because you weren't a good worker. No matter how good a machine operator you were, you weren't any good to them because you weren't going to stay; you weren't going to come to work, or you were going to cause trouble when you were at work. They'd get a lot of that up here but we had no records of what they were. One time, I asked one man how he made [that money] and he said that he made that money because he was a very good worker, but he was blackballed in the southern mills.

BH: Did they have any system of blackballing around here, like that?

LF and MF: No, no...

MF: ...not that I ever knew...

LF and MF: ...only word of mouth—

MF: Well, if they hire somebody like this one fellow they hired down at Mount Vernon. A couple of times, he was drunk. And, he'd come in there and get a job and he'd say he'd be back the next week. Or, on a Friday, he'd get a job and was supposed to be in on Monday. He wouldn't be there on Monday. This one fellow was a *good* worker. She and I were going to work and parked the car on Chestnut Avenue and he was coming up Chestnut Avenue. *Dirty!?* He had just come off of drinking. Mary said, "I want to get out of here and give you a good licking, boy!" He said, "If I knew it would do me any good, I'd wish you would." But he was too far gone. But he was a good worker, when he worked. [unclear] There were too many like that... We had a little sweeper up at Hooper's when I first went up there to work. His name was Mr. Hogan. He would get drunk over the weekend. Achhhh. On Monday he was rank; he smelled awful. And all he had to do was push a broom. I guess he made about eleven dollars a week, but he found that wherever he lived, he had enough to get along on. We had one woman who worked up there. She was from Richmond, Virginia. Her name was Mrs. Warner. She had been in the mill since she was eight days old. Her mother carried her in there and put her in a box. And then, when she became three years old she used to raise havoc, because she'd go along and break the work out of the machines when nobody was looking.

LF: But that was down in—

MF: That was down in Richmond. But I don't think...

LF: Well, I never worked there. An *ex-priest* worked there when you worked there.

MF: Yes. When I first went up to work at Hooper's, we had a lot of people working in our department. Then, they would want more money so they would take more machines to run. We didn't realize that they were hurting themselves. This one other aunt of mine, the one I told you was the actress, said to her sister. "Whoever started running four machines ought to have a swift kick!" And our Aunt Marie said, "I'm the one." [unclear] She said, "Well then, you're the one who ought to have the kick, then." [because she was] running more machines than she should. That's what they wanted us to do, one time. Down in Mount Vernon, she and I were working down there and she was running the machines on the right hand side of the room and I was running over on the left hand side of the room. And one of her machines broke down where she was

working while I was working on the other side. They wanted her to run over and run one of the machines over where I was; the one that was idle. And they told her I could watch it. She said, "No way! She's not watching that machine over there; she'll run herself to death." she said. "And I'm not going to [unclear]--

LF: She's not watching it and I'm not running!

MF: So, it's just like anything else; when you let them know that you're not afraid of them, then you don't have any problem. I guess when you get some years on you, you get—

LF: You get snotty! [Laughter]

MF: You just tell them what's up *town*! That's what this women's lib is all about! Why, I had an argument with the minister down at church one time. He wasn't for women doing different things. We were on a streetcar somewhere, going to a meet, and I said, "I say that if a woman can do the job she's got a right to have as much money as a man." This was back in the early forties. He and I had a hot and heavy. He said, "I don't think so." I said, "Well, I think so. If I can do as much work as the man and run the machine, I should have the same wages as he can get." But he didn't think that way. And I *still* think that way. Because a lot of the time, a man will lie down on a job and a woman will push herself till she kills herself, doing something. Whereas, a male will just do so much and that's it...I get off that men [unclear] [Laughter]

BH: Did the men generally make more money in the mill?

MF: Oh, yes—yes.

BH: Did women seem to do certain kind of work?

MF: No. Even during the War, they were holding the cards, remember? They didn't lay the laths but they could take care of the fronts of the cards.

BH: What do you mean, "took care of the fronts of the cards"?

MF: They took the work off the front of the machine, but they didn't take care of the back of the machine...

LF: They didn't put the work in the back of the machine. It came through the machines. They just took what came through the machines, out the front.

MF: Which was really a man's job, but you couldn't get the men to do it. And, they didn't have the manpower.

BH: But I had the impression that most women did piece work.

LF: Men [did] piecework...

BH: Men did piecework?

LF and MF: Yes. We went straight up to Hooper's, which was the long side of the park.

LF: That long, red building. And the machines we were on were from one end to the other end. And there were about fifty-fifty. There were as many men doing the same work as women. They got the same...

MF: But then, for years before that, there were only men running...

LF: But you got paid according to what kind of work you had been doing. You would run certain grades of work. The worse work, you got the men paid [unclear]. But men didn't want the work because they didn't get as much money out of it. So they put the women down there. The finer the work, the less you got. You could make a good bit of

money. One time they had had a flood down in Mississippi. Hooper would buy anything. He bought these bales. They brought them up and dried them. They were the best quality; high...

MF: Staple.

LF: Staple cotton. This was staple, like fastening. Do you know what staple is [unclear]?

BH: About three inches?

LF: Right. But it was crummy. It had been in the mud down there. It would run all day without any trouble at all, but everywhere that the things came through the works was a little pile of dirt; dried dirt; really fine, gray dirt. And *I* was crying. I looked like if I'd gotten wet I'd have looked like a mud ball!

RF: But the work ran well...

LF: The work ran well and it paid well. I think they only used it for mop yarn, but he got it for practically nothing.

BH: Do you remember red clay cotton?

LF: No, I don't remember anything about red clay.

BH: I guess it was Mr. Hochschild who told me about that, too. He said it was cotton that came in from down there, in Mississippi.

LF and MF: [unclear] That's it. [unclear]

BH: Did it make the walls red, and all?

LF: I don't know what it made, out in the picker room. But that's the same stuff that had the little piles of dirt [unclear] because I ran it.

BH: This'd be in the late thirties, or so?

MF: Yes.

LF: Yes. Because I remember when he worked when I worked. His wife worked up there too, when they were married.

MF: He didn't work there too long.

LF: I don't know how long [unclear]

BH: ...about five years.

MF: Five years might seem like a long time.

LF: He worked in the picker room...[unclear]

BH: Well, could you all describe to me the whole process; just a general description of when the cotton comes in, all the way through the mill; to the end?

MF: Well, they get the bales and they open the bale.

LF: They bring the bales into the warehouse, to the opening room.

MF: And then, they had a chute and it's in layers in the bale. Then they take it out of the bale and send it up to the opening room. Now, from the opening room—

LF: It goes in that one machine in the opening room [unclear] tears it apart. See, they didn't have that [unclear]

MF: Then it goes into the picker room where they pick it all to pieces. They pick the cottonseed out of it and all the little bits that are in there. It tears it up and then it goes through the cards, where it cards the rest of the...[snaps fingers]

LF: They're called the pickers and the finishers. The picker is where it goes after it comes out of the bale. It goes...

MF: up a conveyor belt.

LF: Yes, that's at Hooper's [unclear] where it goes up a conveyor belt. It goes through the pickers over into another machine that finishes—

MF: called the finisher. But it finishes what the pickers didn't pick out of it—

LF: and blows it into a lath.

MF: Yes, and then it goes on the card and it gets carded again and gets the rest of the stuff and lumps out of it. Then it goes through the drawing frame and that draws it out into the first cylinder. [Unclear] like a rope and it goes from there to the roving frames. Then it's put on the [unclear] and put on the first spool [unclear].

LF: And where do the twisters come in?

MF: Twistlers must come in the [unclear] spool [unclear] spinning frame [unclear] It's twisted on. [pause] Hooper had all those pictures on his wall up there, I don't know if they're still up there. He should've made movies of it.

BH: Now, was it twisted to a certain ply?

LF and MF: Yes.

BH: through...[unclear]--

LF: Maybe it'll twist three threads together. Yes. Maybe it'll be only one thread, according to the thickness of the duck, or whatever they were going to use it for.

BH: And then, those three ply from the twister, would go where?

LF and MF: On a spool.

LF and MF: And then they would either sell it or put it down on a bobbin, or run it on a loom.

BH: The looms would weave it down into the duck.

LF and MF: Yes. [unclear]

BH: Is that the idea?

LF: Yes. According to what grade thread you had would be the grade duck you were going to make [pause].

MF: Hooper made tents there for the service during the Second World War--

LF: In the First, too.

MF: Yes. They made mailbags too. That's what somebody who worked during the First World War [said]. They made a lot of them at Hooper's between the time they got married and went back to work, when the First World War started. [pause]

BH: What other kinds of things did they make? Tents and mailbags and hand— [unclear]

LF and MF: Cider press.

MF: and lamp wick...

LF: The lamp wick mill belonged to the St—

MF and LF: the Standard Oil Company/people.

MF: They were Hooper-operated, but they belonged to Standard Oil Company.

LF: And they were the business likely to make the wicks for coal stoves.

LF and MF: They made...

LF: One time they made felt—

MF and LF: cotton felt padding.

MF: They made sash cord and rope. They had a machine that rove the rope that made it look like somebody doing the Virginia Reel, the way that the things went in—

LF: ...like square dancing. It was just fascinating to watch those machines.

MF and LF: They [unclear] waterproofing, when Hooper closed Mount Vernon...

MF: The paper [unclear] had bought them, but they had gotten it from Canada. [unclear] That's the only thing Mount Vernon bought from Hooper, was the paper [unclear] And I never understood anything about them because this building on this side up through Park Street was where the waterproofing was. [unclear]

LF: They would make you a cover for a boat, if you [unclear]—

MF and LF: your measurements—

LF: Because I made a boat cover, that covers over the open part of the boat that snaps on. I can't remember now how much it cost, but they put the holes and everything in it, with eyelets. And the man said it leaked so badly [unclear]

MF: They didn't charge him anything [unclear]

BH: What was shoddy?

[Laughter]

LF: That was the worst—

MF: I never ran the shoddy. They didn't run it when I was up there.

LF: We had a woman who worked up there, she must have been six feet tall. I forgot what her name was. She was a *big* woman. She used to run that shoddy and I'm telling you, she looked like shoddy. She had it in her hair, and all. She'd go eat lunch and she wouldn't blow it off of her. She'd have all that lint on her. What was her name? But she'd run it all the time when I first went up there to work. I was just a dumb kid, and I thought that because she ran the shoddy, that's the way she looked; with all that lint all over her.

MF: She never worked over—

LF: No. She had gray hair and she wore it puffed up like that; like back in the Victorian day, with a big knot on top of her head. Shoddy would be all over her hair. She would work way down at the end, where you worked; at the last two frames. She must've made good money because she didn't bother anybody and all she did was run it through machines.

BH: Well, what is that shoddy?

MF: You know when you buy an old mop? That's just about what it is; a *cheap* mop, because they fall apart after you have them so long.

LF: A cheap mop used to have gray stuff in it, like the padding inside the mattress. It would be a gray color. That was old shoddy.

MF: That was the leavings of shoddy.

LF: Right. And Heller Company used to buy it and what is called a *clare* picking. When you had a roller, then you had a piece of felt on a board. It goes right up against the roller to keep any little things, like lint or anything off the steel roller. You called it *cleary*, because it clears the roller up.

MF: They call it a—

LF: They call it a *clare* but it *clears* the roller off. They have it down over the top roller like this, which is a lid. But the bottom roller had two pieces of—

MF: rawhide.

LF: Rawhide on each side of it with two weights on it. You pull it down. You weren't supposed to do this while it was working.

MF: [unclear] did it.

LF: You pulled it back up so that it would ride up against that roller and all that...

MF: You used to throw it on the floor—

LF: And they'd say, "Don't throw it on the floor." [unclear]

MF: And Heller Mattress was going to buy it. I don't even know if they're in existence any more. I'm not buying any Heller mattress if this kind of *junk's* in it! That's how I broke my hand; pulling down on these clears like this. I had this weight in my hand like this. The rawhide broke off in my hand like that and you'd move the machine like that. It just cracked it really badly. "Doctor" I said, "I can't understand it, I did that more than ten thousand times in my lifetime." He said, "You did it one time too many."

LF: [unclear] It would break...

MF: It just hit the machine; it didn't go *in* the machine.

LF: Just the weight of the machine [unclear]. They used to sell the sweepings off the floor. "Don't throw the paper on the floor, don't throw *this* on the floor, don't throw *that* on the floor, because they sell that."

BH: Is that what they had told you not to do?

LF: She knew she shouldn't do it while the machine was in operation. She would do this because some of this dirt might travel up in there. But you knew just exactly how to do it. They knew we were doing it. You weren't supposed to do it.

MF: But it wasn't anything that you could get *hurt* doing. But I did get hurt because the rawhide got old and it broke as I pulled down on it, just easing it against the steel roller.

BH: Did you lose time from work when you got hurt?

MF: About five weeks.

BH: Did they pay you?

MF: Yes—no. Compensation paid me.

BH: Were you ever hurt other than that time?

LF: She got caught in the machines and if you ever get caught in the machine [unclear]

MF: Twice I got out of it. I wasn't at work very long. See the machines were like this: You had all these double-roll machines that were set at an angle, like this. And as I was walking by it got caught. I don't know how it got caught that first time.

LF: It caught your tail!

MF: It got caught up underneath. [unclear]

LF: It was my machine she broke down!

MF: I pulled the shaft because I was scared.

BH: It grabbed your dress.

MF: Yes. But back in those days you couldn't wear slacks.

LF: Oh no.

MF: Even during the Second World War, they couldn't wear slacks. Then they started just before the Second World War. When they put the girls on the card, they gave them slacks. But one girl wanted to wear a pair of dungarees. The boss said "If you come in dungarees, just pack..." [unclear]—

LF: Well the boss they had down at Mount Vernon, in Meadow Mill, do you remember that boss? He wouldn't let them wear slacks. [confusion] even during the Second World War. My aunt [unclear] had her dress buttoned up. They had to button their dresses up. This was back in the Eighteen hundreds. And she had one button unbuttoned on her blouse and the boss told my father. "You tell your sister to button that blouse."

BH: I wonder why they were so tight about that kind of thing.

LF: I don't know. [Laughter] [unclear]

MF: And I had to wear a white dress up at Filterrite. And *those* machines went twenty seven hundred revolutions per *minute!* That thing was really going. I went by and I had the habit of leaving this white uniform unbuttoned from the waist down. I didn't like the way the uniform was cut. I wore my dress underneath it. And I reached over to stop Lura's machine as I got caught in that thing. [Laughter]. It wrapped me up in that machine. You just had to catch the whole thing like this to stop it and I thought, "Stop it—stop it—stop it!" She was stopping it and I was stopping it. But it had to slow down to a stop. The boss looked at me and said, "*How*, am I going to get you out of my machine?" I said, "Get a knife and cut me out of this damn machine!" [Laughter] And he had to cut the dress up to get me out. I wasn't hurt [unclear]

LF: [unclear] It burst out of the seams at the shoulders...had her wrapped up in there!

MF: The supervisor didn't say anything and I didn't say anything. You had to be going up and down these aisles all the time but you had better believe that ever after I buttoned up that dress all the way down to the bottom. The big boss was standing around there and she [Lura] said, "How about that Mary getting caught in the machine." He said, "What's this—what's this—what's this about getting caught?" I told Lura, "Boy, I could *kill* you!" The supervisor asked me if I was hurt and I said, "No, I'm scared." And the other woman didn't know what to do [unclear]

LF: She was running around the floor [unclear]

MF: She was running around with a hook blade/utility knife and he just sliced the dress off. Not off, just the *over* dress. But the first time I got caught I said, "Oh, I got my slip..."[Laughter] And the boss said, "You don't want to get your slip caught in there; you don't want to get your *pants* caught in there." [Laughter]

LF: It was my machine. I couldn't run it because she bent the shaft on it.

BH: That was at Hooper's the first time; the second time was at Filterrite.

LF: Filterrite. And she broke her hand at Mount Vernon.

BH: Did you ever get caught or hurt, Miss Lura?

LF: No, I fell down one time. I tripped over the stand where the motor was and cracked the back of my head. And I was hollering for her and she thought I said someone else was hurt. They took me down to Mercy Hospital and they had a little foreign doctor there. So, he x-rayed my head. I had to lie on the table and x-ray first one side and then the other. Then, I said, "Aren't you going to cut that hair off? That's fine, I don't want that hair growing in that hole where I had split it open." So he said [high voice] "Yes, I cut it." And I said, "Aren't you going to put a *bandage* on it? He said, [high voice] "Yes, I put bandage on it." I said gee, I might as well of fixed it myself. But I was gone about three hours with that whole thing. If I had thought, I wouldn't even have allowed [unclear] to the hospital.

BH: That was the only time you were ever hurt, though.

MF: You get your hands caught.

LF: See how my hands are? See where the light, light places are? That's where I've gotten them dug up and scarred up. But otherwise I never got hurt.

MF: I never got hurt either time I got caught in the machine. But people have been hurt badly. [unclear]

LF: They have gotten their hands...

MF: About nine times out of ten it was their own fault. That was my fault.

LF: One woman got three fingers cut off while cleaning the machine. That was when what you called hard waste, which is a whole lot of string is there. And it pulled her fingers in and cut them off.

MF: But she was...

MF and LF: cleaning the machine while it was running.

LF: Well, any dummy ought to have better sense than that.

BH: Well, what did Hooper do about that?

LF: About what? About her fingers being cut off? He would give her a couple of hundred dollars and that's all.

BH: Did she still work after that?

LF: I guess she did. That was before my time; before I went up there to work.

BH: Oh, you just heard about that.

LF: Well, you know how it is with family. My aunt told me. We had seventeen in our family working up at Hooper's. I was ashamed with all of them working up there at the same time. It ended up with just you and me.

BH: You were ashamed?

LF: Ashamed, with all of them saying, [high voice] "Oh, one of your relations is working here."

MF: You couldn't do anything without some relation knowing about it. [Laughter] Everybody was in a different department. Oh, my golly. That was the worst it ever was, when seventeen of us were working up there. Then they said they couldn't hire any more; there were too many in one family. If somebody died...[unclear] [Laughter] [unclear]

BH: Is that what you told them up at the church that day, that they wouldn't put people from the same family in the same department?

MF: Well, we couldn't get our vacation together because we did the same kind of work! And if we had gone to Mr. Hooper, he would've seen to it that we got it together. But the bosses in the department wouldn't let us...

End of Side Two

