

AVONDALE MILLS PROJECT

Interviewer: Edward Aikin

Interviewee: Josie Lumpkin

May 5, 1981

A: This is an interview with Mrs. Josie Lumpkin at her home in Birmingham on May 5, 1981. Now was your name Josephine?

L: No, it was Josie.

A: Just Josie? Now what was your maiden name?

L: Haynes.

A: H A Y N E S. When were you born?

L. 1902.

A: And where?

L. It was down below Anniston.

A: OK.

L: I don't know what the country you call.

A: Community is OK. Now did you grow up there?

L: No, we I think I was about two years old and we moved to Anniston, Alabama

A: OK so you grew up in a large town. What was your Dad doing during this time what job was he?

L: Well, he owned a store.

A: A general store?

L: Grocery store.

A: And your Mother did she helped there at the store or was she?

L: Well she did some.

A: Housewife, homemaker. Now how many brothers did you have?

L: I had three.

A: Three brothers. Any sisters?

L: And three sisters.

A: And three sisters. That was convenient.

L: I 'm the only one a living now.

A: Now where were you in the order of children? Were you one of the older ones?

L: I was the baby.

A: Now how far were you able to get in school?

L: Fourth grade.

A: Fourth grade. Now what year was it when ya'll got married, when you married?

L: '21

A: Do you have any children?

L: I have two, one son and one daughter.

A: OK. Are they still living here in Birmingham?

L: Yeah.

A: Good. Now did you ever did ya'll ever purchase, buy a home?

L: No, me and my husband didn't.

A: Now we get down to the great topic of religion. What is your religious persuasion?

L: Baptist.

A: Are you a member of a church here?

L: First Baptist Church at Birmingham.

A: That's good.

L: Yeah it is.

A: That's nearby where you can go fairly often if you're feeling well. Now when did you start what year did you start textile work?

L: When I was fourteen years old in Anniston, Alabama.

A: OK. About 1916. What was the mill?

L: It was the old Anniston Mill I reckon.

A: Anniston Manufacturing wasn't it. I think Roberts, was Roberts the president of that one.

L: I don't remember.

A: Later on. OK. What other companies have you worked for other than?

L: Well I worked at the White Manufacturing in Gadsden.

A: Of course Avondale and what other any others?

L: There was a little mill over here in Vanderbilt. I worked there I guess about two or three years.

A: Now I know it changed names several times. It was Stroud Holcomb for awhile.

L: Yeah, I believe that's what it was when I worked there.

A: I know in the thirties it became known as Birmingham Manufacturing or something. OK. With Avondale, how long did you work at Avondale?

L: Well let's see I went to work in about thirty at Avondale and I was off thirteen months in '40, '41, sick, and then I went back to work and worked until I retired.

A: Which was what year?

L: I retired in 1964. See I lost my seniority.

A: Yeah, ten years of it.

L: I was off thirteen months but I got my ten year pin later then I before I retired I got my twenty five year pin. So I worked at Avondale about thirty five years.

A: Yeah, yeah and only got credit for twenty five of it. OK, what were the job or jobs the different type jobs you did there?

L: Well, I weaved and I filled magazines and I've done most anything in their weave shop that anyone could do.

A: Yeah like as I understand it, usually you would start out like as a battery filler then learn to weave along the way.

L: Well I knew see I knew how to weave and do all of that when I went to work.

A: That's right. That's right.

L: And so I weaved most of the time but I went to filling batteries at the last magazines they called em.

A: Yeah, OK. Now I don't guess you were doing anything else other than working at the mill. I mean you weren't helping on the farm or anything.

L: No, I lived here. Had two kids.

A: Yeah. What about other relatives that worked?

L: Well my son worked there about ten years.

A: Now, what's his name?

L: Bill.

A: Now that's not the guy on the paper is it?

L: No, it's another Bill.

A: Anyone else?

L: My daughter worked there for awhile but I don't know just how long she worked there but I imagine she worked there about six or seven years.

A: This would've been like when they were teenagers and early twenties.

L: No, it was after she married.

A: Really? Well now what about relatives working in cotton textiles in general? Did you have folks working in Anniston?

L: Well I had a brother and sister to work in that Brighton mill there. They was working there when it closed down.

A: OK. Now Dwight is technically an Alabama city isn't it.

L: Yes. It's just warehouse now.

A: Yeah. The reason I was wanting to make sure that the Birmingham Public Library got the records from Dwight. One of the guys that works at the library was driving along the interstate there and you know you can see the mill off from it and he saw somebody from the second story window throwing out stuff and he went there and they were throwing out the records so he got them to give them to him.

L: My son-in-law worked there too but.

A: Now was this at Dwight or Avondale?

L: Avondale. He worked I don't know how long he worked there. They was married twenty five years when he died and he was working at that he worked here and they sent him to Jackson, Georgia to that mill there to take over.

A: Carpet yarn.

L: No, it was weaving.

A: It was.

L: But I don't know the name of the mill and he worked there till he died. He went to work that morning and they had to bring him home and he died at the apartment.

A: Yeah. What was his name?

L: J. T. Maddox.

A: I've run across several members of the Maddox family. Did he have several others who worked with the mill?

L: Well, uh I don't think he.

A: That may have been a different group.

L: Must be a different group.

A: Well now what this amounts to is that you have seen some big changes in mill work over the years.

L: Yes I sure have but I started in I didn't make too much let's see I don't I forget how much I made there but anyway I worked one time and I was makin \$26.00 and something every two weeks and when I quit work I was makin ,oh about \$10.00, \$12.00 a day.

A: Well now let's start back with the Anniston company. The first one you worked with, what do you remember about your first experience?

L: Well I worked in the cloth room. I sewed in heads in bales of cloth you know they bale it up, I sewed in the heads and fifty cents day and then they put me on the inspecting machine and then they moved me from that to the we called it working on a table where you cut out bad places and wash out bad places out of the cloth and all and then I went from there to the weave shop and I've been working in the weave shop ever since.

A: Now when you first started working there in Anniston did ya'll live in the mill village?

L: No, we owned our own home.

A: So ya'll were how near were you. Could you walk to the mill?

L: Oh yes. Yeah we walked.

A: Now you said your Dad was a grocer.

L: Yeah, he run the store.

A: Did he have a lot of business with mill folk?

L: Well I imagine he did cause I don't remember hardly that way back but he had lots of trade so but see my Mother we had housekeeper so she could help him in the store. We had pretty good trade I guess. I was baby child and see I don't remember as much back now one of my brothers sisters here, they could tell you a whole lot.

A: Yeah.

L: But I worked there I didn't work there too long till I come to Birmingham.

A: Now the what did your older brothers and sisters go into. What kind of work?

L: Well they was in the mill too. The whole family was. I had three brothers and my sisters all working but two of them got married you know and they left the mill there at Anniston, so at Gadsden I just had one brother and one sister working there.

A: What did your brothers and sisters end up doing once they left the mill? What type of jobs?

L: They retired. They worked there till they retired.

A: OK.

L: My oldest brother well both of em, I had a brother and a sister working there you know when it closed down but they both just.

A: But nobody in the family took over your Dad's grocery business?

L: No he just went out of business.

A: Now you're starting to get in to the weave room, how did you first get introduced to the weave shop?

L: Well I was working in that cloth room you see and I went from the cloth room into the weave room there at Anniston and then we moved to Alabama City Mill and I worked there till oh I guess it was about '20 and my Daddy got married, my Mother died, and married again and there's just too many there in little four room house so I came to Birmingham and stayed with my aunt and worked here so I worked here then for you know when they went on eight hours?

A: Yeah, the NRA in '33.

L: I was working there.

A: Yeah. Working?

L: I was working at Avondale Mill.

A: At Avondale. Well now do any special memories stand out when you were working with Dwight in Alabama City?

L: Well, no, I don't reckon. I just.

A: Had your wages improved over Anniston any?

L: But you know I don't remember how much I made and I don't remember how much I made when I first went to work in at Dwight.

A: Now of course while you were still at Anniston and at Alabama City, I guess your folks still had the grocery store so you didn't have to worry about debts to the store and that sort. Did either of those companies back then have company stores? Do you know?

L: Well the Anniston didn't but the Dwight did have a company store and so let's see they had a dry goods store.

A: Did a lot of the workers trade there?

L: Yes. You could go there and buy what you want and they'd take it out of your pay.

A: And so you didn't feel it until pay day anyway.

L: They had a drug store there. It was a company drug store. They had two doctors there taking care of the people.

A: Well how would their village and their company programs compare with Avondale?

L: Well, they I tell you the village was a lot nicer you know than the Birmingham was and but they sold them houses there you know when the mill closed down and when the Avondale mill closed down I think before.

A: Right. Well long before that.

L: Before they closed those houses my son bought one he lived in one and so I can't hardly remember.

A: Well things like at Dwight, did they have anything for the workers beyond the housing and the medical services. I mean things like recreation camps.

L: No. No. Now Avondale did.

A: That's what I was trying to do get some idea of.

L: Well they had Panama City, Florida you know they had camp up there and we could go up there when we get vacation and I know one time after I retired I went up there and carried five more women with me.

A: Oh yeah, in fact you can still take advantage of that you know.

L: We had our cabin and all our eats and we went up on Thursday and we stayed till Sunday and it cost us \$6.00 a piece.

A: Yeah, that's great. Well now you came to Birmingham to work at the little mill.

L: No, when I come to Birmingham I went to work at Avondale.

A: You started work at Avondale?

L: Un huh. I worked there about two years and then I quit. I got married and it was a good while before I married I mean before I went back to work and I worked over there at Vanderbilt and I left there and come back to Avondale.

A: So those two years would have been about 1919, 1920 right in there?

L: Yeah, somewhere along in there.

A: Do you remember back then what the conditions were in the mill?

L: Well it was just all hard work. I'll tell you that.

A: I understand back then the lint was flying through the air and a lot of machinery was exposed you know that you could get hurt fairly easy.

L: Well you could get hurt mighty easy in that weave shop or any part in the mill but the cloth room I reckon was about the safest and they was some of them that got hurt in there, fall down you know in the floor and get hit with the looms cause they don't stop they just keep going.

A: Yeah, yeah, but looking at those two years about 1919, '20, '21, then you left it for about ten years and came back, did you notice any big changes?

L: No, not too much only we made more. We made more money but they made before I quit I reckon a few years before I quit they put in lots of new check looms you know they was making solid material and then they put in check looms you know make check cloth.

A: Those box looms?

L: That what I worked on keeping the filling in all of em.

A: I was talking with Wilbur Wade a couple of weeks ago you may remember him. He worked on the box looms, a fixer and he gave me a very detailed description of what those were like.

L: Yeah, I believe I remember him, Wade. Have you been down through the mill village?

A: Yeah, in fact I was over there yesterday and I'm to go back this afternoon. Do you remember Mary Bagwell?

L: Yes.

A: I'm to talk to her this afternoon.

L: Have you talked to Willie Bell?

A: Oh yes. Willie Bell was one of the first I talked to.

L: Oh boy. She worked there all her life. She can give you more information about that mill than I can.

A: Yeah. I pretty much covered the village or at least those who are still there. There aren't many left now.

L: I sure did hate to see that old mill go down cause it a lot of memories gone from it and every time I pass there I just feel so bad.

A: Yeah. Well now you got married in '21 and didn't work for awhile? Didn't work outside the home?

L: Well I went to let's see I wasn't out too long till I went back to work but I was out of course a little while when the babies were born but I always enjoyed working for Avondale. They were good to you. The bosses was good to you and I always enjoyed my job.

A: On this form here you'd mentioned that you worked at the little mill for a little while before you went back to Avondale.

L: Yeah.

A: What were some of the differences between the two? I take it the little mill was smaller.

L: Well, it was smaller and I was workin seven days a week for \$5.00 a week and it was so far for me to get over and back I quit.

A: Where were you living at the time?

L: I lived over there on 40<sup>th</sup> Street here but I just couldn't make it. It was so far to walk over there and then I had to walk back at ten o'clock you see up that railroad track.

A: Yeah. You were on that second shift?

L: Uh huh. Then they put me on the first shift as spare and then I didn't get enough work to pay me to walk over there every morning and back every evening so I quit.

A: How did that sort of thing work? Would you just show up at the mill and if there was somebody off?

L: Yeah. I'd go and if there was anybody off, I worked but one morning I went over there and I didn't get to work and it was pouring down rain and I had to walk home from that mill up here in Avondale at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and when I got home I was just wringing wet so when it was raining like that, why I wouldn't go cause I was afraid I'd have to walk and so I went over there one morning and he'd put everybody else to work so I asked him was he going to work me and he said well said when I need you, you're not in here you're always stuck in here that's what he said the boss was there. I said, I looked at him and I said well I tell you one thing I won't be stuck in here no more and I walked out and never did go back.

A: Yeah. And how?

L: That's when I went back to work at Avondale.

A: Uh huh and this would have been about 1930?

L: Yeah.

A: Did you go back to work at Avondale before NRA came in?

L: Yeah. I was working there you know when they went on eight hours.

A: Now I know at the time that NRA came in I talked with some people who just didn't believe it was going to happen. Do you recall some of your thoughts?

L: Yeah. I didn't know where it was goin to happen or not but it did and I was glad cause I tell you, you work from six o'clock in the morning till twenty five after four in the evening and it's hard but I believe I was working on the evening shift and that was about the time I was off that year thirteen months and so I asked my boss about putting me on the first shift cause it would be better for me because when I get home I wouldn't have the house to clean up cause my daughter lived with me and so she always had everything cleaned up and I didn't have to go in and that helped me a whole lot cause I still wasn't very strong.

A: Yeah. Do you remember looking at that first pay envelope after NRA?

L: Oh yeah. Yeah, Lord I thought it was something.

A: I guess you voted for Roosevelt after that?

L: Yeah. I don't vote. I don't know why, I just never have voted.

A: Well, you need too.

L: Well, I need to but.

A: You have as much impact as the big banker does on this. Well now when you came back with Avondale at that time, did you start out weaving? Did you get a stand of looms at the time?

L: Well I was just spare hand then but I had a good boss, Mr. Mooney, and so I went there because I'm within walking distance. So he told the second hand you know put her to work that if he possibly could put me to work, because I was always in there every morning and I usually got to work too.

A: Yeah. Now about how long were you a spare hand before they gave you a stand of looms?

L: Oh I wasn't there I don't remember just how long, but I gave me stand of batteries. When I went back I told em I'd fill batteries or weave and so I was filling batteries when they got to they knew I knew how to weave too and they what they called the smash board, that's when there's a whole lot of threads big ole bunch of threads break out you know, and they were behind but he'd take me off my batteries and put me on that to help out you see and so I didn't fill batteries too long till I had a regular stand of looms and when I retired I had a stand of batteries the weaving got too hard for me and the looms they had me on I was too short for them and I couldn't reach over you know they had so many harnesses and I couldn't reach over and so they put me back on the batteries.

A: Now back in the thirties, how many looms was considered a standard job?

L: I believe they were running a hundred looms. They I know they put me on a hundred looms one time by myself and I liked to work myself to death. But, they I don't think they were running that many when I retired. I retired in '63. No my husband died in '63 and I was having bad health then my blood pressure and everything and so the kids wanted me to retire then but I worked on.

A: Now did you husband work at the mill or where did he work?

L: He worked outside painting the houses but he didn't work long. I'd say about two months and so I had to retire. I retired.

A: What was he doing other than that?

L: He was a painter and a wall paper hanger.

A: Now, I guess did you get your children involved in Kindergarten and things like that?

L: Well, no I never did get em well I think they was a little bit too big for that cause when my mother-in-law always taken care of my children cause I lived close around her and she always taken care of my children when I was at work. Of course after they got up fourteen or fifteen

years old why they taken care of themselves after school till they but my daughter married at fifteen and so my son he was at home and he stayed on with me until he was bout twenty.

A: Now you said during most of this time you were on the first shift working at the mill.

L: Yeah. I filled when I retired I was filling 104 magazines that's to keep all that filling different colors of filling in there for the weavers. It was hard work too.

A: Yeah. That's what I was fixing to ask you. Did it keep you constantly going?

L: Yeah, uh huh. My job started on one side of the house. I think there were sixteen looms in each area and they went across the bin and liked about a row and a half going all the way across. Time you get started over here and get over there you had to walk way back over here and start over again.

A: Yeah. What you have a little box or something you pulled with you?

L: Yeah. No. Now when we filled the batteries they the looms with just plain cloth see all their filling was just alike and we had box there but then we had a big sack we wore but after they put the check looms in and some of them had four different colors and they put a box on each loom for the pick,

A: Uh huh, then you would transfer it from box to the shuttle.

L: You'd just reach over there and hit it and drop it in the magazine but had to because see it was so many different colors and so much of it alike till we couldn't carry it around in a box.

A: Now right after World War II, it seems that ya'll were probably better off than you have ever been. Do you remember some of those bonus checks?

L: Yeah, I was weaving that time. I was weaving time of the war. We had to work Saturdays and Sundays lots of time on Sundays and I tell you it's hard work. Mill work is hard work but I enjoyed it and I liked the people then liked my bosses and they all liked me.

A: Well, that always helps.

L: Yeah. The day I retired why they gave me a big send off, set of luggage.

A: Good.

L: My boss bragged on me bout how good a hand I was. He was nice. All my bosses were nice.

A: Now you had mentioned J. D. Moon who else was over the weave shop while you were working?

L: You know I can't remember. Let's see Mr. Moon and Mr. Ballard use to be the boss. No, I know what's his name. Well I forgot what his name is. Oh, let me see. I know him he was so nice to me.

A: Well now back then were you going to Packer Memorial?

L: Yeah. I just joined the. Naw, I went there before and after I married but my kids got started going to that little Methodist church down there.

A: Fortieth Street?

L : On Fortieth Street and my husband joined it and so I went there with them but when he died, I moved to Central City I went back to the Baptist.

A: Yeah. Great. Sounds like you had an interesting life. Stayed busy.

L: Yeah. I but after all the kids got married off I had to do all my house work and work in the mill too but I enjoyed working there. It was a good place to work. It was just all together the people were nice and all and everybody got along alright and everybody got along with their weavers.

A: Yeah.

A: Talked for a little while after the interview was over and during that time Mrs. Lumpkin mentioned that she was still drawing on her Avondale pension. It seems to be an annuity type contract with her and she mentioned that she was drawing just over \$25.00 a month which seems to be pretty rough for a person who has put in thirty five years of service to a company. But, in any case she went on to point out that she didn't have any option on the type of retirement plan. That years earlier others had and one of the options was to draw out \$50.00 a month until your part of the profit sharing had been exhausted. Under her particular plan, she will draw \$25.00 a month until her death. Should she die before her amount that she had put in to the retirement is exhausted, then the remainder in a lump sum would go to her daughter which is a traditional type of annuity plan.

END OF INTERVIEW

