

[The Shoe Machinery Worker]

Section #[7?]. Mass. 1938-9

JUL 10, [1938?]

Name: Jane K. Leary, 32 Acorn St., Lynn.

Informant: Patrick Ryan, 153 Jackson St., Lynn.

Subject: The Shoe Machinery Worker.

"I'm agoin' on my 79 years now and I've bin workin' ever since I could lift a hand. Why I don't remember the time that I didn't climb over the fence of the school that waz wuz near Collins St. then, to go to the ten footer shoe shop that my father made shoes in, to help him during the noon hour. I'd climb that fence after school at night too, ta sew the upper s , to the bottom.

"They were turn shoes that my father made, mostly congress style. They'd be wrong side out when I sewed 'em to the sole, and then my father'd turn 'em and finish 'em off, ready to be sold.

"There were thirteen in our family and most of us had a turn at helpin' our father in that old ten footer. When one would get old enough ta quit school and go out and look for a job, the next in line would take ta helpin' my father.

"I remember particularly a younger brother a mine who had ta help him after I had graduated from that and had taken feedin' the nailer in a shoe shop down town. He wuzn't very strong, my brother; it sometimes seemed ta me he 2 wuzn't strong enough ta pull that string through the sole. I can see him yet as he pulled."

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My informant criss crossed his arms, demonstrating the old method of “pulling a wax end.”

“He wanted ta be a machinsst machinist , that young brother of mine, an' after he got too old ta help my father in the ten footer he went an' took that up. But for a long time he only got a dollar and a half a week at it. My father wanted him ta quit an' go in the shoe shops so he'd get more money. He thought he'd have a better chance in life that way.

“But I said; ‘let him be.’ And I told him, that if he'd keep on he'd be on easy street some day. I wuz makin' good pay in the shoe shop then, and everywhere I went I took that fella along. We'd go into Boston to a parade, or to the theatre and like that. I paid the way because I wanted him ta keep at the job he wuz at even if he wusn't gettin' so much then.

“And I wuz right. Most of that fella's life, he's been a foreman and gettin' his forty, fifty dollars a week. But at the time he was laearnin' ta be a machinist it didn't look as if that would be much of a job. It wuz a case of lookin' ahead.

“I guess most of the congress shoes my father made wuz of sheepskin. It wuz a nice comfortable shoe for ladies with a sensible heel. All the women wore them in the house 3 in them days. Some that my father made wuz sent to the south for ladies an' others of the big sizes wuz for the colored. They slipped on the foot. There were no buttons or laces in 'em, but a rubber gore on each side, that would stretch to let the foot in.

“The uppers come all stitched in a factory down town. Then after me or one of my brothers sewed 'em to the sole[;?] my father turned the inside out and finished 'em, ready for the heel. Ya know them turn shoes are always sewed to the sole inside out and then they are turned.

After the shoe wuz all ready for the heel, we put 'em in a big basket. It looked something like the old fashioned market basket, only much bigger, In that we'd carry 'em down town to the shop we wuz makin' 'em for, and get paid by the pair. Saturday wuz the day ta take the shoes in an' I remember how sometimes my father'd work all night Friday so as to

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have all the shoes ready to take in. There wuz usually four men in a shop, workin' piece work, each man for himself. My father rented his seat from the man that owned the shop. The shop I'm a talkin' about is now over at Beverly on the grounds of the Shoe Machinery Corp. It wuz got for to show the diffrunce (difference) in makin' shoes fifty years ago and today.

Some years ago when the San Francisco Exposition wuz bein ' held, they got four of us over at the Shoe Machinery 4 Corporation ta have moving pictures taken of us makin' shoes like they used ta make 'em. Then they took pictures of a modern shop ta show the diffrunce.

“When that picture first come ta Boston, they took us all in and we had supper before goin' to the show. It wuz shown all over the world. I guess. When it come ta Beverly most of the men at the shop went ta see it and when the men working in the section with me come ta work the next morning they said. ‘Pat, you wuz the only shoemaker in the bunch.’

“ Wwll Well , I oughta looked like a shoemaker, all right. For I wuz one when I wuz a kid.

“Oft times I worked in the shop with my father until way after it'd be dark, 'specially on Friday nights. I'd be afraid ta go home too, because of the stories the men'd tell each other when they wuz working. They'd be ghost stories about Ireland because all four that worked there wuz Irish. My father come from Tipperary.

“And sometimes the sotries stories would be enough ta scare ya. I remember one cold winter night when I ran as fast as I could go towards home, till I got to the edge of Silver Pond, that is filled in now, where Meadow Park and Eastern High School is now. There wuz a pig pen there and a dog, and hearing them, made me think a ghost wuz sure around. I ran so hard I forgot about a big rock on the edge of the pond.

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When I stumbled on it, I was thrown, I guess, and I didn't come to on the ice for quite a while. When I did I got up and made for home as fast as I could.

“My father's home wuz on Collins Street and it's still standin'. I own it now. And when I pass on beyond, I want ta leave it to my oldest son with the provision that he never sell it. When he dies, I want him to leave it to his son. And if my grandson ever has a son, I'd like him to get it. I'd like to feel when I pass on that that old house will be taken care of as long as possible.

“There are some that's not much interested in preserving things that are past. But I take an interest in that old house. There I wuz born and there all my twelve brothers and sisters were born. I'd hate to see it sold.

“I've always been a homebody. But sometimes I think that those people who stay pretty much in one spot, get as much out of life as them that goes from one place to another. I wuz at a funeral the other day of an old friend of mine and the driver of the car that took me to the cemetaery cemetery had traveled to a lot of places. He wuz a young fella.

“ ‘Been aroun' much? he asked me.

“ ‘No, ‘I said, ‘I stayed in one spot pretty near all my life. I ain't been aroun'.

“ ‘Oh! said he, ‘Ya oughta go places and see things. There's nothin' like it'.

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“ ‘Well, ‘I said, Mebbe I ought; mebbe I ought, but I've always been pretty well satisfied at home.”

“And ya know, I have. Mebbe I missed something, but too ya know there's an old sayin' that the man that travels a lot never gathers much moss.”

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"If my wife and me kin hold on till next October it'll be 50 years since we are married, and then we're goin' ta have a celebration. We've got a lot of friends ya know, and about a year ago, some of them were here from New York.

" 'Are ya goin' ta celebrate?' they asked us.

"You bet we're goin' ta celebrate if we're here that long. Fifty years if [of?] beuog being narried married ? We won't let that go by without a celebration. It is something, ain't it, ta be married for fifty years, to stick together through thick and thin and raise a family of eight children.

"It wuzn't all easy sailin'. Sometimes we didn't have just everything we wanted ta have but we always had enough. An' we worked together, and we never bought what we didn't have the money ta pay for. So today we don't need to worry. We have enough ta get along on.

"We had our disagreements. Who don't? The other day I waz wuz down to the barber shop an' I told him I'd been married almost fifty years.

" 'I don't suppose you ever had any arguments he said.

" 'What' I said, 'No arguments! Of course we had our arguments. Everybody does some time or other. But we straightened 'em out. And we got along pretty good. We worked hard to bring up our family and we sacrificed the same as any other family has got to sacrifice for our children children .' [1-1?]

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" 'Yes', said the barber, 'Who don't have arguments, one time or another.'

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“ ‘But that’, I told him, ‘is what makes for progress. It would be a funny couple and a funny world if everybody thought the same way. No one would ever get anywhere that way. It's when arguments' got anger in them, and there's no tryin' ta see the other fella's side a things, that real trouble comes. Most arguments got two sides to 'em, ya know.’”

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