

[James Dowling—Pittsfield]

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PUB. Living Lore in

New England

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WRITER Edward Welch

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Crane Paper Worker Dalton 12/22/38 Mass. 1938-9

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

NAME OF WORKER EDWARD WELCH

ADDRESS PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

SUBJECT LIVING LORE

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT JAMES DOWLING, PITTSFIELD,
MASSACHUSETTS

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James Dowling is fifty-three years old, short, stocky and gray haired. His nose - bulbous and slightly red - is his outstanding feature. Due to an attack of typhoid when he was young, Mr. Dowling had to prop his right leg on a chair seat or rest it on the floor with his left leg dangling over the arm of a chair.

Mr. Dowling's father and mother were of Irish descent, hard working and ambitious for their children. James was expected to "make good" and he was given as good an education as the family could afford. For years, he worked in the Crane Mill, but a hair trigger temper which he made little effort to control cost him his job.

Mr. Dowling tries to talk carefully and chooses his words with deliberation. Occasionally he lapses and then tries hard to make amends, with bigger and better words.

We had been calling on some old friends — a Dalton paper mill family — hoping to have a good long conversation. Sickness in the family put an end to our scheme. Dropping into the post office to see who we could see, we bumped into Jim Dowling. We have known Jim for years and he's always friendly and ready to chat. Hoping to get a lead for an interview, we happened to say, " You're an old-timer, around here, Jim. Born here, weren't you? " That was enough. Jim was off and we had our interview.

"No, Ed, I wasn't. I was born in Pittsfield in 1885, went through the grammar schools there and attended the Pittsfield High School for three years, and then went to the Albany Business College. Some of Berkshires' most prominent men were classmates of mine at Albany. You know 'Bricky' Purchase, County Commissioner? Well, he was a student and a darned good one.

"When I was nine years old we moved to Dalton. Father insisted that I continue on in the Pittsfield schools, so until I finished my high School, I drove a horse and buggy to Pittsfield. After completing my course in Albany, I worked in a clothing store father had purchased. It was then on the corner of Main and Flansburg Avenue. I worked there

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with dad for a while and then I decided to take civil service examination for a position as counter in the Government Mill.

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"I remember one morning, Marsh Crane, (he owned the Crane Mills, that is, his family did) came into dad's store. I was busy filling out the civil service application form and Marsh looking at me said, 'What are you doing Jimmy, making out a will?' 'No', I answered, "Just making out an application for examination as a counter at the Government Mill". Let me see that application a minute", says Marsh. Taking it, he wrote on the bottom: "Applicant has my personal endorsement for position applied for———" and signed it with a flourish. Well, I passed the exam all right, and went to work soon after.

"You know the Cranes, although they're worth millions are the most democratic folks you ever met. Why Marsh and the rest of the Crane boys played with us as if they lived next door. The Senator, that's W. Murray, he gave our church, a Roman Catholic Church, mind, a grand pipe organ. Ah! They are real people.

"Did you like working in-the Government Mill?"

"I certainly did. It's mighty interesting. Take the girls that work there for instance, the four who are under Civil Service. They start in at \$1350.00 a year, get thirty days sick leave and thirty days vacation each year. A registered nurse takes care of them when they are sick, and their job is a clean one. They have to count ninety thousand sheets of money paper a day. And for a time they used to do it and check out of work at two in the afternoon. Well the management thought that if the girls could count 3 ninety thousand between the hours of eight in the morning and two in the afternoon they should get more out by working their full time. So a rule was posted to the effect that the help must stay at the plant from eight until five, the regular working hours. This didn't increase production, for the girls only turn out their ninety thousand.

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“You know, it's a funny thing, so many people think that the manufacture of paper for currency bills, is a highly protected secret. Most any paper maker could make the stuff, or should be able to. Every single shred of that paper must be accounted for at the mill, though. On the machine that makes this paper is a clock, as we call it. It counts every piece of paper made. In case the machine should break down or a piece get torn this is taken out and placed in a jar of water to soak up and then put back in the beaters to be used over again. This is where the government supervision comes in. A man is sent from the Treasury Department to supervise the Government's employees and keep count of all paper made. There are six employees under his direct supervision. Four girls who work as counters, and two sealers. The rest of the workers are civilian employees. The working conditions at the Government Mill are O.K.

“You know all the paper for the Liberty Bonds was made right here in Dalton at the old Berkshire mill. Currency paper is made for many of the Latin American countries, too. This is called planchette paper. Instead of silk thread that go into the making of U. S. currency paper, small round paper discs are put into the planchette. Most of China's paper currency is made here. All this planchette is made for the American Bank Note Company of New York. Crane Interstate Mill makes the paper for China, while the planchette is made at the Bay State.

“Say, how many Government employees did I tell you worked at the Government Mill? Six, eh? Well, I was wrong. There are, let me see, 5 Counters, 2 sealers, 4 packers and 3 guards. Guess I'm getting kind of rusty.

“You know Dalton is a Republican town. The folks here are grateful for the fine things the Crane family have done for the town and mostly vote the straight Republican ticket. The Democrats are few and far between. It isn't because the Cranes have asked anyone to vote for them. They never have. But the Senator was such a fine man the townspeople feel that they got to because of the generosity and the charitable needs of other members of the Crane family. Nobody goes hungry in Dalton. The Cranes see to that. If a man with

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a family is taken ill so that he can't work for a few weeks, or months, or years, the Cranes take care of him and his family.

“The last election certainly was a disappointment to me. Look at the way the Republicans carried this state. And no wonder, with 5 Curley trying to make a comeback, there was no one to vote for. A vote for Curley was a vote thrown away. I hated to see Owen Johnson get beat. What this county needs is a good Democratic Congressman like Johnson. Treadway never has voted for the laboring man. He gets pensions for war veterans widows, and things like that, but any damn fool could do the same thing. He votes for the big corporations that rob these veterans' widows. I don't think Johnson would do that. Berkshire County would have been much better off if we had a Democratic Congressman during the past eight years. We were out of luck with Treadway. What happened in the CCC Camps and on the WPA? Men and women from the eastern part of the state got all the good jobs. That wouldn't have happened if Johnson was in. Local men trying to get jobs in the CCC camp had to write to David I Walsh, in Boston. But he did nothing for them. He was too busy with his own people. People kick about politics, living conditions, and everything else, but do nothing about it. They just won't think for themselves. They let the newspapers, magazines and radio think for them. When election time comes around they listen to a lot of hot air and bushwa. They forget that it was the Democratic President Roosevelt who saved their fortunes, fed them, clothed them, and through the different governmental agencies gave them a new lease on life, by creating jobs for them. They forget to be grateful, so after listening to some crooked political spellbinder who did nothing for 'em, but criticize the man who had done something, they believe the livered-mouth crook and vote for him. Why don't these voters think for themselves? They're too damned lazy. Barnum was right when he said people like to be fooled. The politicians are doing the same thing to this President that they did to Lincoln. It's a damned shame.

“They have a tight political set-up here in Dalton. The Republicans rule the roost. There is only one Irishman on each of the Town Boards and they keep it that way. But I'll have to

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admit, we have and always have had a pretty efficient administration, darned conservative too.

“Well all in all Dalton's a good town to live in. There is a neighborliness not found in many other towns. We're pretty well off industrially. I have lived here the better part of my life and am satisfied to stay here as long as I live. I don't know of any town in the state any better off. Say, I'm sorry, but I have to hop. Promised Dick I'd pick him up before noon. Come over to the house some time.”