

Mill Workers' Oral Histories

W.O. Garrett

Bibb Mill

Interviewer – Why don't you start out by giving me your full name, birthdate, that sort of stuff.

Mr. Garrett – W.O. Garrett, and I was born the 24th day of August, 1912, in Pike County, Alabama on the banks of the Pea River.

Interviewer – You were saying that you were born there?

Mr. Garrett – That was my home – my mother and father lived there. I grew up right off the banks of the river there. I grew up in that community out of Monticello and Banks. We farmed, we was farming down there all the time. I did a lot of fishing on the Pea River. In 1933 I decided I wanted to do something besides farm and I came to Columbus then, and went to work in the card room.

Interviewer – The card room at the Bibb?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, the card room here at the Bibb. And so my daddy he was contracting for the state highway department, building bridges, and he was cranking a horse and tractor and busted his knee. He had to have somebody down there to look after the job there that he had under contract – he wasn't able to work for about thirteen weeks, so I had to go back home. I left here and went back home to help him with that. Me and my wife had started dating, well, we'd been dating before I came up here, and my brother come up here and said , "Effie's about to have a fit wanting you to come back home," so they all thought that's the reason I come back home! That might have been part of it, but anyway, we got married then in '33...

Interviewer – You were married in Pike County?

Mr. Garrett – In Pike County. So then that fall my daddy had an extra farm, and he was going to let me run it that year. So I went up there and farmed on that land that year. He had us a house fixed and everything to move in, we went and bought our furniture. Didn't have to have but six chairs and a little table and a wood stove. They give us all the other stuff we needed and we picked up different things for housekeeping. But we never did move in it, and at the end of that year we had a daughter born. So they sent down there to, I think what caused it, to come up here was, I can't think of his name now, he was in the weave room. He come down fishing and I decided to come back and go to Columbus and go to work. I had a cousin who lived on Park Avenue over here in Bibb City, we come up here and stayed with him, and she went to work as soon as we got up here. So I kept the baby until I found what I wanted, and so I found the job I wanted upstairs where she was working. It was in the same department, but in a different section from what she was doing. So I went to work the 22nd day of February, 1935. I stayed right in that department forty-three and half years.

Interviewer – What department is that?

Mr. Garrett – Spooling and warping. She was a spooler operator, and what I started doing I started doffing beams and dumping yarn and whatever they had for me to do. In a short time, I had a cousin up here and he was running the scales and weighing beams. We did a lot of stuff for Manhattan Shirting, a lot of dyeing – we had a dye house at that time.

Interviewer – At the Bibb?

Mr. Garrett – At the Bibb. We dyed a lot of yarn made for Manhattan Shirting. It took a lot of patterned beams to run it, and it took a full-time man just keeping that stuff running, because

we'd run three or four hundred beams in a day. So they all had to get weighed and stored until the slasher room got ready for them, to put the starch in it, you see. His wife was working on the job where she was, and she got mad at the overseer and slapped him, and the overseer fired him and her both.

Interviewer – Your cousin? Because his wife slapped the overseer?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah! Then they promoted me up to the scale job then.

Interviewer – Oh, the scales.

Mr. Garrett – I was running the scales and they put me as what they call the head creeler, and I was over all the creeling on the warpers. We had a lot of old draper warpers then, we had sixty of them, and that's where Mattie Mae Cane was working when I took over that job on the scales. She creeled in these warpers and run warpers. She run an old warper they called the end-twister, and she was the best hand we had at laying out a pattern in the creel. When you run stripes, you had to set your spools a certain way in the creel where it would come out right on the front, see – when it went through the drop wires and everything and come out on the front. She'd make the right stripes, and sometimes it would take eight hours a day to creel one of those creels, but she knew what she was doing and she was real good on it.

Interviewer – So you said that your family were farmers. What did your family farm? Was it any specific thing, or were they farming for the family?

Mr. Garrett – We grew cotton, corn and peanuts, and raised stock – cattle.

Interviewer – To sell?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, that’s right.

Interviewer – Well how did you get interested, or I know you said you just wanted to get away, to Columbus. I guess that was just the industry in Columbus at the time.

Mr. Garrett – Well, the farmers wasn’t making any money at all hardly, because we had just went through that bad depression. Well, that’s why I left there to start with. I sometimes worked on the farm and would make fifteen cents a day, picking cotton. And that’s about as hard a job as you can get. That was before I got grown, about the time I got grown. I couldn’t pick but about a hundred pounds of cotton, and they paid fifteen cents per hundred for picking it.

Interviewer – So you were offered a guaranteed wage if you moved here.

Mr. Garrett – That’s right. Well, in 1933 when I come up here the NRA hadn’t come through and we were working two twelve hour shifts. So then after Roosevelt was elected they brought in this split in the shifts and made an eight hour work day. It was an NRA program, and they had to put on three shifts instead of two. Then they had a minimum wage of thirty cents an hour, when I come back, which I was making nine cents an hour when I first come up here.

Interviewer – You were making ninety cents an hour?

Mr. Garrett – Nine. Nine cents an hour. My wife, she learned to spool for five cents an hour.

Interviewer – Oh gosh! That’s terrible!

Mr. Garrett – Well, when the minimum wage went in at thirty cents an hour, you could work forty hours and draw twelve dollars a week. That was lots of money then. Twelve dollars went as far as two hundred will now.

Interviewer – Now you're talking about twelve dollars for the forty hour week after the NRA came in, right?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah.

Interviewer – Well, before that, since you worked before, what kind of wages were you making before?

Mr. Garrett – Twelve hour shifts, and we were making about nine cents an hour, five days a week.

Interviewer – Sixty hours a week at nine cents. Wow.

Mr. Garrett – And there wasn't no overtime either, it didn't make a difference how many hours you worked over, you got paid the same. A lot of the workers was making ten or twelve cents an hour, but I didn't stay long enough to get that.

Interviewer – When you were working a sixty hour workweek and making only nine cents an hour, you must have wanted some kind of reform, I'm talking before Roosevelt came in. Were the people happy in the mill?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, they were just like a family. Management treated the people pretty good, and they'd have meetings and pull all the people together and talk to them and explain to them

and they gave them cheap rent. You could rent a house like we had – two rooms – for forty cents a week or fifty cents a week. There was two different prices – the newer village was fifty cents a week. Then if you got sick or anything they'd look after you, and they'd either let you have money or they'd pay your hospital bill and you could work it out later. You had security. That was the main thing.

Interviewer – So ya'll lived in the Bibb village?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah.

Interviewer – So after you were married, I'm just curious, how did you apply for a house in there?

Mr. Garrett – Well, I rented two rooms upstairs over on Park Avenue from my cousin that brought us up here, and we moved up here on the car – the stove, the chairs and beds, everything on the car. We moved upstairs and we didn't have no bathrooms then, we had outside facilities. We had spickets upstairs, but we had to tote our waste-water and everything downstairs. We didn't stay there but a few weeks. After I went to work, I went to the plant manager and asked for some rooms. And they let me have a house with two rooms, there where the church is at now, where Porter Memorial Church is at on Hansen Avenue. Right on the corner. And there was another family that lived in the other two rooms. It was a four room house, and we faced Hansen Avenue. We didn't face the school, our house faced Hansen Avenue. Then after we'd lived there about a year, I found three rooms open down on Hemlock Drive, 90 Hemlock Drive. I asked for those and they let me have them. We were both working there, see, and we had proven that we would both be secure there with them, so they went

ahead and give me the rooms. But the reason why they, I had to move anyway because they was fixing to build the church, and the company moved me down there to them three rooms. They had put in bathrooms by then, and we was living good then.

Interviewer – With an inside bathroom? (laughs)

Mr. Garrett – Then we had a son born in 1936 when we lived there on 90 Hemlock. I had got promoted to a fixer on spooling and warping, and at that time I was making seventeen dollars a week fixing, and top pay for forty hours was eighteen dollars. So I come back from the hospital when my son was born and I told them, “ I got a boy, I want that other dollar’s pay.” And they said , “Here’s your envelope!”

Interviewer – So most of the people who worked in the Bibb lived in the houses in the village?

Mr. Garrett – That’s right, and I think that’s one reason why they could afford to pay lower wages. Of course, all textiles was way under the average pay then. Which now, textile mills is paying as good or better than a lot of other jobs. Then, you had all the advantages because they had the village for you and cheap rent, you didn’t have anything to worry about – it come out of your envelope every week. At first they paid off in envelopes of cash, then they started paying off in checks. We stayed in the village – we moved from there to Woodham Circle after our kids got a little bigger.

Mrs. Garrett – We moved from Woodham Circle to 12 Hemlock.

Interviewer – Was the company moving ya’ll or did you request it?

Mr. Garrett – We requested these moves, see, as the children got bigger we wanted more room. That was so far over there, and I had got promoted to shift foreman, that I wanted to get closer back to my work. We got back on Hemlock Drive at number twelve. We had a five room house there. Later on I had gotten promoted to overseer, and John Turner, he was the plant manager, he said, “ I like for my key men to be close by. Would you move up here in front of the mill?” When he spoke, when he said scat, he was like the man that had nine holes in his door, he meant scat! If he wanted you in the mill, he wanted you in the mill. He wanted all of his key men close by. So I moved up there in a house right in front of the mill, right next to Clark’s store there. The second house from it. John Lovett lived in the first house, and I lived in the next house. I stayed there until I needed more room, then when the children got up large enough. We needed more room; we didn’t have but that living room where we had it, dining room, kitchen and two bedrooms. We needed, with a son and daughter, to get them a room. Then this house come open and I asked for it. Mr. Turner said, “I don’t see why you don’t move down there.” I said, “I want to stay down there as long as I stay here. That house is big enough for me and my family now.” He said, “Well, go down there and stay as long as you want to.” So I moved down here, and then of course when they sold the village I bought it.

Interviewer – Mr. Turner sounds like a real nice man...

Mr. Garrett – Oh yeah, he had a feeling for people. He said one time that he ought to have been a doctor, and I told him he’d of made a good one. He had a feeling for people, see, and he was a great man. Besides that, he knew his business; he knew what he was doing. He made the Bibb more money I expect than any other manager they ever had in it. He kept the plant alive. If he

could have, if top management would have let him alone and let him do like he wanted to, Bibb would have probably still been Bibb like it always was. Of course, he's dead now. They forced him to retire. They ought to have let him stay on. Because when he wanted something, he drove hard for it. But the top management up above him, the board of directors, didn't like some of his ideas. That's the only way they could keep him from pushing things through like he wanted it. So they made him retire at 65.

Interviewer – So when you became overseer of your department there in warping, you stayed overseer until you retired?

Mr. Garret – I stayed overseer until I retired. While I was overseer of spooling and warping we had a small cord weaving out in front of number one, and a twisting and winding, and they needed to curtail back the management, we was losing money, so they cut out a lot of help. I took over the twisting, cord-weaving and winding and kept spooling and warping. But when things got better then the departments kept growing bigger and bigger, and they put in more spinning. They gave me an overseer for twisting and cord-weaving and I continued back with the department I was originally in to start with and stayed right there until I retired.

Interviewer – Well you worked in the mill, like we were talking about earlier, and then moved back to Pike County. Then you came back on the 23rd of February, 1935. Then you remember the labor dispute and the trade union trying to come in in '35?

Mr. Garrett – They were working with the help, having meetings and trying to organize the plant.

Interviewer – The national trade union?

Mr. Garret – Yeah. I didn't get into that, but I could see that they was fixing to have problems. I was kind of glad I was out of it when they did have problems. But they had a strike there before I come back.

Interviewer – Yeah, in September of '34.

Mr. Garrett – It never did get a hold. That's one thing the Bibb just couldn't see. They couldn't see somebody organizing a union or telling them what to do, see? They were always willing to help their people and give them anything that the union could give them, or more so. I think the union was a good thing for the purpose it started for. But they went too far with it and got a lot of crooks and politics in it, and it was just a rotten thing.

Interviewer – So you think that by the time they got into the Bibb it was just not...

Mr. Garrett – They never did get into the Bibb. We never did accept the union. They never could organize it. I remember one time right after I come back; they put in and tried to organize.

Interviewer – This is in '35?

Mr. Garrett – This was '35, and I was out setting out front. I knew there was something going to happen. But anyway, there was two organizers come up on the bus with their literature and everything going to pass it out, and by the time they hit the ground, there was a mob there on top of them. When they left they had to leave their shoes – they took their literature and shoes and put them out in the middle of the street and burned them. One of them run under Clark's

store, there was an old warehouse there, and they drug him out from in there, with him barefooted. They got away. Of course, we never did know who all done it. Bibb City police had tried to break it up and did help keep them from injuring the people too much. That kind of quieted them down. They didn't come back with any literature for a long time.

Interviewer – No, uh-uh.

Mr. Garrett – I think they tried to prosecute some, but the ones they picked up and prosecuted was from some other plant, wasn't none of our employees. I don't know how they worked it.

Interviewer – I know that during the big strike down there at the mill there was some people hurt.

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, they said they was pretty rough at that time. That was a period between the first time I worked and when I come back. But they tried to organize it after I come back, and after that they realized that the people just wouldn't stand for it. They just quit trying to organize.

Interviewer – Why was it that the people would not accept them? Was it because...

Mr. Garrett – The Bibb, they believed in the company they was working for, and the Bibb was so good to them. They explained all the time when they were – if a wage increase come up, the Bibb was right ahead of it. They kept the people informed of what was going on all the time. And they stuck by their people. I think that's the biggest thing, because it was just like a big family. Everybody stuck together. If somebody got sick, everybody pitched in and looked after them. If anybody got sick and had to stay out of work, they'd make up a little groceries and

carry it to them. It was a community that was just like a family working together. Our children grew up under that policy. We had two of the best teachers up there at Bibb City School that you'd ever seen. Miss Eva & Miss Lita Gardner. Miss Eva was principal of the school and Miss Lita was assistant. Of course, they had teachers under them. I give those teachers credit for the way my children come up. They've both been very lucky – they both finished high school. Then my daughter got married after she finished high school, but her husband went on and finished college at Auburn. My son, he graduated from Georgia Tech. Whenever summertime come, we had parents in the country, so we'd let them go to the country. When Jerry got up old enough my wife worked with the Cub Scouts and I worked with the scouts – she was a den mother. We brought them up in an environment to keep them from getting into something else. Kept them occupied. We went to, the year Jerry was going into his eagle scout, he went out... what's that place he went out to? Where they carry the scouts out... I thought I'd never forget the name of the place. Anyway, he was converted on that trip. He come back and wanted to join the church the next Sunday. He got out, they wouldn't let him carry no money with him, and he called me and wanted enough to buy him a rubber mattress, and I sent him the money. I think I gave him ten dollars.

Interviewer – I've heard people say that the Bibb school up here was one of the best in town. That the teachers, that their pay was supplemented by the mill. They were paid what regular teachers were paid and then the supplement, so that attracted the better teachers.

Mr. Garrett – That's right. They had good teachers and they stayed with them. The children was raised like I was raised. They were raised like they ought to have been raised.

Mrs. Garrett – Jerry got helped out with his education, too, because he'd work three months and then go to college three months. For four years. He worked at the Bibb for three months and then he'd go to Georgia Tech.

Interviewer – Oh...

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, he co-oped. He got a scholarship, and that helped him. He got \$2,300 a quarter on a scholarship, and then he worked his way through just about it. I didn't know he'd go on to get married before he finished school. He got married and after he got married he needed more money than I could afford to give him, so Bibb let him have what he wanted to finish his college.

Interviewer – The Bibb did?

Mr. Garret – Yeah. Bibb let him have the money to finish his college. Told him he wasn't obligated no way in the world to the company. So when he come back, Fieldcrest made him a whole lot better offer than the Bibb could. And he went with Fieldcrest, North Carolina instead of coming to the Bibb. I don't think that – he saw that he could get a better, could promote himself better, I mean he had a better opportunity with Fieldcrest than he had here. He was afraid that he'd be stuck in the office somewhere down there and he wouldn't get out and take part in the plant. What he wanted was to get out and learn something about the plant, and he'd already worked through the plant, too, here. So he went up there and went right straight through and it wasn't long until he was superintendent up there. He's been with them 26, 27 years.

Interviewer – So your son went into textiles. Was there any other family members besides your cousin who went to work in the mill? What I'm trying to establish is that this is a family thing.

Mr. Garrett – Well, yeah, I had two cousins – Homer Rowan worked up there until he retired, so he and his family, then Tolbert Harold was the one who brought me up here. He left though, in about 1945 or somewhere along there I think. He went back to Dothan. But we didn't have, that's about the only people I had up here was cousins. My sister and her husband come up here and went to work, and they worked here until they retired. She lives down on Hemlock now, number twelve Hemlock.

Interviewer – Well the Bibb had this huge village that people lived in down here, and it was an ideal community. There was the Anderson Mill up here, and Columbus Manufacturing...

Mr. Garrett – Well what happened, Bibb owned all this land, from here all the way over to Oates Avenue. They owned all of that land. During the war, we had such a tremendous amount of production to go through, because we was working directly under the government to get war materials out, and they built that village over there during the war when nobody else couldn't build nothing much. They built it for the employees so they'd have enough help to operate the plant the way they wanted to.

Interviewer – You're talking about...?

Mr. Garrett – The Anderson village. And that's how come that Anderson Village – they named after old man W.D. Anderson – he was the president of the Bibb at that time. That's why it's

named Anderson village. It was built during the war for the people, so they'd have enough people to operate the plant.

Interviewer – But it was never a village in the sense that Bibb village was...

Mr. Garrett – No, it never was called Bibb City. In other words, Bibb City only goes to Second Avenue here. And that is the end of Muscogee County, see? We in Bibb City, it's a different city from Columbus. We're still in the county. We pay county tax, but we don't pay city tax. But right across the street, Columbus pays city tax. And the people in Anderson village has to pay city tax. They're not in Bibb City.

Interviewer – So the Anderson village never developed that fraternal feeling that the Bibb village had.

Mr. Garrett – No. Things was drifting in a different direction about the time the war was over. People had gotten to where they wasn't as close as they were before. The old village people are still close. They still look after one another. But it's, there's a lot of people in Bibb City that's retired, see? They're still pretty close knit. Our mayor, he's an old-time worker who worked with the Bibb all the time. Johnson was the mayor before he was, and he was retired from the Bibb, then he died. Vance has been elected three times as mayor, and as long as he's able to do it he'll still get elected. Everybody'll keep him because people want to see their own people. It's like in these old westerns, 'we take care of our own.'

Interviewer – That's true! The Bibb never had a company store or anything like that, did they? Anderson village didn't either when it was a village, but they did before. Before the Bibb bought

it out didn't they have some kind of company store where the people were paid in almost like scrip money, but I think it was called goog-a-loos or something...

Mr. Garrett – You're talking about a situation before the Bibb bought that.

Interviewer – Right, uh-huh.

Mr. Garrett – That was what they called the Meritas Mill then. And the man who was killed over in Phenix City, he's the one who run that store. He's the one who helped break that Meritas Company, see? He was, well, I've read a lot of things, stories like that. He'd issue them out so they could buy stuff, and lend them money during the week, and he sold moonshine whisky to them and everything else. He just controlled all the workers over there. Another thing – I had a lady at work who come back to the Bibb and worked for me running warpers – she worked over there and she, at the time she was there, said she had a cat and a dog both on the payroll. If they drew thirty dollars, she got ten and he got twenty. He got two thirds of the check and she got one third for letting him put that cat and dog on the payroll. That's the way he broke the company.

Interviewer – Oh, I see... Crooked. Bibb never had anything like that?

Mr. Garrett – No.

Interviewer – And so when the Bibb went in and bought Meritas out?

Mr. Garrett – It was shut down for several years before the Bibb bought it.

Interviewer – It was broke.

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, it was broke and they just lost it completely. They'd had to keep up too many cats and dogs.

Interviewer - ... dead relatives...

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, dead relatives and everything else. That's about all I knew of this. I didn't get involved with it, but I knew it was going on because he had a big gambling place upstairs, up there where Ford's drugstore is now. There was a big gambling hall up there, and he owned all that property across the street and then owned some on this side. My immediate boss, when they had that gambling hall up there, I've seen him go up there a lot of times and lose his whole check at the gambling hall before he could even go home. He'd go up there and sometimes he'd be lucky and sometimes he'd lose his whole check before he went home.

Interviewer – Gosh, that's a shame. Well now my Great-Grandmother has told me that at one point, but not for very long, that the Bibb paid off in scrip. Was it right after Roosevelt was elected and the banks were closed?

Mr. Garrett – Probably was.

Interviewer – Do you remember that?

Mr. Garrett – No, I was out at the time. I come back, see?

Interviewer – Oh, that's right.

Mr. Garrett – That was probably in the period betwixt '33 and '35 when I come out.

Interviewer – It was, it was...

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, must've been.

Interviewer – I know that oftentimes people within the village, you know there is that feeling of family, and they're all protecting one another, that sometimes it's like the village versus the rest of the city. Do you know what I mean? The city people had a certain idea about the people who lived in the village. What was that like back then?

Mr. Garrett – Well, we didn't have any problems with Columbus. We didn't get as good a cooperation as we do now. Now then Columbus is in cooperation with us, whereas one time we had to have our own jail, our own courts, and everything. Now if we have any problems we have to use the jail in Muscogee county, see? They have the courts in Columbus city court. But Columbus Police and Bibb City Police work close together now. They have to, just about, because there's a lot more crime. Back when we first came here, we could go home for a weekend and we never locked the house or nothing else – everything stayed right open. You didn't never lose nothing. You didn't have things like we have now. You didn't worry about nothing.

Interviewer – Harry Harden told me something interesting. I interviewed him – I'm sure you know Mr. Harden.

Mr. Garrett – Yeah.

Interviewer – He told me that during the war, the Bibb ran busses to I believe he said Richland?

Mr. Garrett – Right.

Interviewer – Tell me about that, because he told me that after the interview...

Mr. Garrett – Well, what happened, we couldn't get enough help. There wasn't enough help available. After building the village and everything we still couldn't get enough help. We were working hard to give the government what they needed for the soldiers, see? We were making tire cord and twill for their uniforms and tents, and ripcord and everything else. The whole mill was on production for the army. And we couldn't get enough people to operate the plant. So we bought busses, and put a scout out finding people out far as we could. We had seven from Richland come here to work during the war. We had a problem now – we worked people that was underage. We like to got in trouble about it.

Interviewer – Oh ya'll did it knowing that they were underage?

Mr. Garrett – We didn't – the overseers like I was, I couldn't look at a child and tell how old he was. We had a man in the personnel office that would go out and scout around, and they'd go out to Richland or somewhere else and find a child big enough, a healthy child, and if they was sixteen years old or something like that – you had to be eighteen legally before you could go in the plant – if they were sixteen or seventeen they'd go back and get a record out of the bible, and that said when you's born, and they could change that Bible record any way they wanted to.

Interviewer – The overseer?

Mr. Garrett – No, the family would, to get them a job, see? So then they got to recognizing that we were working people who were underage. Some of the people from Richland, their daughters were working up here. I didn't know how old they were. So we managed to get out of it, we had pretty good lawyers. We did have to pay a fine for the man who did the scouting

around to get the children, named Jones. He got probably three or four hundred people that was underage and illegal to work.

Interviewer – You said “they”. Who is “they”?

Mr. Garrett – The Government. The labor board come in and got to going through the plant and checking and finding young people. Of course, they tried to prove that was how old some of them was. When we went to court, there was one boy who was nineteen years old and they had him in court because he was so small. It was Robert Ets. He was a little short fellow. He looked young, too. Looked like a child. When he come up, he had his birth certificate and went down there, and that gave a big light on the whole situation that we couldn’t tell how old they were by looking at them.

Interviewer - Yeah

Mr. Garrett – Because we produced this boy that was older, he was nineteen years old and had a birth certificate showing it, that he was that age, and we could look around at these other children and we couldn’t tell how old they are. You’d look and think this child here was fifteen years old, sixteen years old.

Interviewer – So you had a good defense for the Bibb then.

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, that’s right.

Interviewer – Do you remember who the lawyer was?

Mr. Garrett – Max Thompson was our lawyer from Macon. Now, I don't know at that time if Max was lawyer or not. But that wasn't the only one – they had several lawyers. There was one case, it might have been the same thing, I had to go to federal court. They tried the case down at the post office. One of the girls worked for me, and they tried that case. When the lawyer questioned me, our lawyer did so much interrupting that he couldn't get too many questions. I had an assistant overseer that was a preacher, and a lady got me mixed up with my assistant overseer who was a preacher. She knew he was a preacher, but she thought I was the preacher. So he asked me if I was a preacher, and I told him no, that I wasn't a preacher. They crossed up so bad that they didn't never get nothing. I didn't know how old the girl was. I couldn't tell. She was taller than you are. Looked like she might have been 19 or 20 years old. Wasn't no way for me to tell it.

Interviewer – Well not everybody back then had birth certificates.

Mr. Garrett – I didn't have one until I wrote for it. When they started Social Security I had to order it from Montgomery, Alabama.

Interviewer – Now if the Bibb was sending busses scouting people out down in Richland, was that in Georgia? I thought there were more black people living down in that part of Georgia.

Mr. Garrett – About all the people that we hauled in were white, I believe. The Fussells and the Ridges, there were several different names but I can't remember that was hauled in down there in my department. In the rest of the mill I don't know who all come and went, but they had a big bus load come from Richland alone. They went right on after the war – they were good hands.

Interviewer – So the Bibb went down and got them and brought them up here and they stayed in the village? Or did they take them back and forth?

Mr. Garrett – No, no, they took them back and forth.

Interviewer – Every day?

Mr. Garrett – Every day.

Interviewer – Wow.

Mr. Garrett – They'd bring them to work, send them back home, bring them in the next morning and put them back to work. After that was over with and the war was over with and our contracts run out with the government, we had to go back, see we was making a plus cost material and we had to get out of that plus cost, cost plus. You got a percentage over the cost to make it. Then we couldn't afford to do all that. So we sold some of the people the bus that were riding the bus, and they took over the bus and kept coming to work right on. As long as we were running cost plus we could afford it, it did cost the government a lot, but they did need the material, see?

Interviewer – And that was the only way to get it. It had to come from within.

Mr. Garrett – You had to get the manpower in there to put it out.

Interviewer – You said that most of the people who came in, who were brought in, were white people. Now I know that in this...

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Cont'd

Mr. Garrett – After the war, there was blacks kept increasing. They trained them in the card room and they run machines there, and they kept on getting better educated black people and bringing them in. They were intelligent enough to learn other machinery, and we kept bringing them on in and they kept increasing as they were available. If they could pass the examination, we accepted them just like we did white people.

Interviewer – What kind of examination are you talking about?

Mr. Garrett – Well, they had to have a certain amount of education. You'd find that black people at that time weren't educated the way they are now. They didn't advance as far in school. We've got a lot of white people now that are supposed to be educated but they're not. The only test there'd be after they passed the personnel test would be the health test if they had enough education to read and write. Before I left up there I had sixty or seventy percent colored people.

Interviewer – But when you first went to work there...

Mr. Garrett – There weren't any at all.

Interviewer – So you saw the transition come in.

Mr. Garrett – Right. I was the first person that promoted a black person to a fixing job. An advanced job in the plant.

Interviewer – Oh yeah? What year was that? Do you remember?

Mr. Garrett – No, I don't know what year it was, but Clarence Wadkins – I put him on a fixing job. I had sixteen fixers on that one job, that one department, and after they got available and got to learning where I could train them, I had at least half of them was black.

Interviewer – As more and more black people began to work in the mill, I'm talking early on, were they met with acceptance by the people in the mill? I know that there have never been any black people in the village.

Mr. Garrett – You've always got somebody that's a troublemaker somewhere. Now, I had a nephew that I had in the mill, and he didn't like black people. I had him on a (unintelligible) job. I had to fire him on account of him threatening one. When we had something like that to happen, we knew to clear them out. That settled that – that stopped it right then.

Interviewer – Well at first they came in working as sweepers and cleaners...

Mr. Garrett – Well, all the time, about all the cleaners and sweepers was black. Then as the times changed and the black people were available we got to teaching them to run machines. Today I expect, I haven't been up there in ten years, but I expect 90% of them is black.

Interviewer – At least 80%.

Mr. Garrett – They're operators, and they're doing good jobs. They do just as good a job as anybody. I couldn't see, if I had a black person and a white person, I couldn't see any difference in the color. What I was after was the quality that they could produce. It didn't make any difference to me what color they were. I was raised up on a farm and raised with black people. We had wages hands and we built a room on the side of the house for our colored people. They

stayed there and milked the cows and helped out – I was raised with them. I had good friends who was black, and it wasn't no problem for me.

Interviewer – But some people, it was.

Mr. Garrett – That's right. It was for some people. They couldn't stand it. It was awful. There was a lot of prejudice betwixt the whites and blacks. They'd call them niggers and things like that, and I didn't like that.

Mrs. Garrett – You had several colored people up there who worked for you who'd do anything in the world for you.

Mr. Garrett – They still come to see me now.

Interviewer – Yeah, that's good.

Mr. Garrett – I have visitors every once in a while come around. And I don't care where I am, if I'm in Atlanta or where, if I see one who knows me he's gonna holler at me. I have a lot of good friends who's black.

Interviewer – Now my great-grandmother told me that when she worked in the mill and she would get a raise, now this is kind of strange, but whenever she got a raise, they always increased her work. They upped her production quotas. So if wasn't like she was getting a raise, she was just having to work harder. Was that true?

Mr. Garrett – Yes it was. A lot of it was true. They had this methods and standards department come in and they'd study the motions, how people work, and actually, as the minimum wage

come up, every year it had to go up some. Now I think its three dollars and thirty five cents, but when it started out it was thirty cents an hour. But you had to come up with that minimum wage, and when they changed it, we always stayed, we tried to pay our people about five to ten percent above the minimum wage before the wage come into effect, so it wouldn't take too much. We kept them above the minimum wage always by about 5 to 10 %. There was one discriminating thing they did have, you could call it discrimination, but it was a more skilled job, cleaning people were paid less than people who were operating. Blacks did both jobs, but if they were capable of operating a skilled job they made more money. But cleaning jobs is not considered a skilled job and they drewed less money. But it got to where it'd keep bringing that lower-paid person on up until now I expect they make pretty good on it.

Interviewer – And women made the same pay that men did for the same work?

Mr. Garrett – Right. My wife made more money than I did to start with. She was working on the piecework.

Interviewer – Good for her!

Mr. Garrett – That's right! After she went to work, she was on piecework and she could earn fifteen percent above standard production. Which, every bit you earned above the standard you got paid for it, see? You were paid eighteen dollars that first week.

Mrs. Garrett – Lord, I thought I was rich!

Mr. Garrett – I wasn't being paid but about fourteen then.

Interviewer – You had to say yes ma’am to her then, didn’t you! While I’ve got you here, I’m going to move this around here. Do you mind if I ask you something? You were working in the mill as you had your children. I know now people are always hollering about maternity benefits and maternity leave and that sort of stuff. Did the mill, I know there was the village and everybody helped out when you were hurt, but did the mill come in and say, “Okay, you take this time off.” Was there nurseries provided and that sort of thing?

Mrs. Garrett – No, we had to furnish our own home care. But then, there was a lot of colored women that wasn’t educated, they could take care of children, and they knew how to cook and wash and iron, stuff like that. You could get one for five dollars a week.

Interviewer – Oh really?

Mrs. Garrett- Stay in the home. We had a, I think it was what was called an army cot, and we fixed it up in the kitchen for, we called her our cook, to sleep on. Foot, our children loved her just about as good as they did us.

Interviewer – And so she lived with ya’ll in the village then. My great-grandmother had said that when she went to work there, she was raising up an uncle of mine, and that they had a room for the babies to stay in while they worked, and then they could go and feed the babies and come back. I thought that was pretty interesting.

Mr. Garrett – You’re talking about this building right around here on First Avenue. Right out there’s where they had that nursery. It’s that big long house.

Mrs. Garrett – I don’t know who lives there now. But that was after our children got grown.

Mr. Garrett – That was way before this. She was talking about during the war when they had the nursery. We had that out there for women to come and nurse their babies and feed them.

Interviewer – As the women were working in the mill, during the war,

Mr. Garrett – Yeah.

Interviewer – I guess the war drained a lot of your men out, and that's why you had to go to places like Richland, and the women came in the mill, and that sort of thing.

Mrs. Garrett – We worked twelve hour shifts a lot of times during the war. All of us on the first shift would work until three o'clock, second shift would come in at 3o'clock in the morning and work until...

Mr. Garrett – And we worked seven days a week. We were getting every yard of cloth, every bit of material we could through there.

Interviewer – Um-hum.

Mrs. Garrett – Second shift worked from 3 o'clock until 11 o'clock in the evening. That was eight hours. Then we'd come in at three o'clock in the morning and work until three in the evening.

Mr. Garrett – The reason they had to lap over that way was there wasn't enough people to fill a full shift on all three shifts. See, you'd be short of help on the second shift, then the first shift people would come in and lap over and fill that job that there wasn't enough on the second shift to hold, see?

Interviewer – I see. So what year did you say you retired?

Mr. Garrett – What year did I retire? 1977.

Interviewer – After, let's see, 42 years of work.

Mr. Garrett – I come in on the 22nd day of February in 1935, and I left on the first day of September in 1977.

Interviewer – And because of the time period that you worked down there you saw a whole lot of changes take place.

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, it would take me a month to tell you about how all the changes come about. They was so gradual, but the changes – it's not even like the same place at all. All the machinery changed and all of everything changed in the plant. They went from one thing to another, back to normal. It's just another thing through and through. Like the people change their ways. When we went in there, all the people that was operating was white, and when I left out there were more blacks than there were whites. In that period of time. And we had a lot of intelligent black people in there when I left there. They made good hands.

Interviewer – So not only technologically, but personnel-wise you saw all kinds of changes going on.

Mr. Garrett – They had to learn how to associate with white people, and the white people had to with them. Now, you'd get a hold of some bad black ones just like you would white ones. They'd resist white people just as strong or worse than the white people would resist black people. We thinned them out right quick. You've got to get one with the right kind of attitude

to mix them up. If you don't have them with the right kind, if you get a bad one, either side, either color, if you don't get them away from that, you're going to run into problems. One agitator can cause more problems than fifty can straighten out. Just don't allow them agitators to stay around – try to keep good people.

Interviewer – Well let me ask you something, if there was one thing, or something about the mill during the time that you worked there that you thought could have been done better, or would have made things better. If you could have changed it, what would it have been?

Mr. Garrett – That would be hard to answer.

Interviewer – Since you were an overseer, and in management, I just wondered if there was something you saw that could have been done better that maybe... I've gotten so many different views.

Mr. Garrett – I don't know how to explain it, but I had a lot of ideas that I thought would be better, but it would be so minor and be so personal that as a general thing I couldn't see what I would do to change the way they had the standards or the way they went about doing things but there were a lot of small, personal things I would have done differently. But in general I don't know what I could have done.

Interviewer – I haven't asked anyone else that question, but you seem as if you've got very definite ideals and that sort of thing, and I wondered if there might have been something you would have changed. That's a hard question, I know. Well, since you retired then you've just been living in your house that you bought from the Bibb?

Mr. Garrett – Yeah, I've been here ever since. I've got my children and grandchildren, and my daughter, she lives here. All of her children live here except one who's in Athens. He's over in Switzerland right now.

Mrs. Garrett – He's supposed to come home today.

Mr. Garrett – He's in, he took up some kind of research. He started out in medicine at Emory University in Atlanta, and then he took up biology and got into different kind of chemical work....

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