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ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA
 400 Hal Greer Boulevard
 Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667
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SUBJECT: Owen Glass History Project

ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: _____

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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: 6/14/94

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OWENS GLASS HISTORY PROJECT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: CHARLES DAY

CONDUCTED BY: CHRISTINA KASPRZAK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 14, 1995

Christie: Today's date is June 14, 1994, and I'm interviewing Mr. Charles Day for the Owens Glass History Project. And why don't we begin with what year did you...well, let's begin with when were you born?

Charles: December 9th, 1937.

Christie: Were you born here in Huntington? (Yes, ma'am) So you've lived here your whole life. When did you begin at the plant?

Charles: It was August the 6th, 1962.

Christie: What job did you start at?

Charles: I started in the shipping department.

Christie: You started in the shipping department. How older were you?

Charles: I was 24.

Christie: Twenty-four. What kind of work did you do in the shipping department?

Charles: Uh, we loaded box cars mostly, then. And uh, inside a few trucks.

Christie: I see. Uh...so, did you change jobs?

Charles: Yeah, I worked there a year, then I came down to the personnel department.

Christie: Personnel. And what did you do there?

Charles: It was all outside maintenance work. Took care of all the outside of the plant.

Christie: Were you a supervisor?

Charles: I was a crew leader.

Christie: Crew leader, in the maintenance? (yeah) And what did you do after that?

Charles: I stayed there aft-, I stayed there 'til I retired. (you did?) Yeah.

Christie: When did you retire?

Charles: Uh...May of last year.

Christie: May of '93?

Charles: '92.

Christie: '92, okay. Uhm...how did you get the promotion into

maintenance? Crew leader.

Charles: You just...seniority mostly got it.

Christie: Did you have to do extra training? (no) No. Uh...well, did you have other families that worked, I mean, other family members?

Charles: My father-in-law worked there. (he did?) He was a machine operator. He was there right about 40 year, I guess.

Christie: So he was there a lot of the same time you were there?

Charles: Yes.

Christie: And he's the only other family member? (yes) How did you enjoy your work there? Both the shipping and the maintenance?

Charles: Oh, it was the best place I ever worked. It, you'd get off and then from work in the evening, you couldn't hardly wait 'til the next day to go back, so.... Yeah, they was really good to you. There couldn't have been no better job.

Christie: What kind of things did you like about the job?

Charles: More or less...

Christie: Pardon?

Charles: You was more or less, you could do about anything you wanted to.

Christie: Did you have friends that you worked with?

Charles: Yeah, I had, at one time, we had 27 others working at the same job I had.

Christie: Did you do things with them outside of the plant? (uh-huh) What kinds of stuff did you?

Charles: Oh, we took care of the club house, too. And we did the cookin' for the parties. It was a just a real fun place to work.

Christie: Now, are you married?

Charles: Yes.

Christie: So, did your wife also join in some of the activities?

Charles: No, she works at a different place.

Christie: Oh, so, she didn't go with you too much to the activities?

Charles: Well, some; not too much.

Christie: Do you have children?

Charles: I got two. I have a boy and a girl.

Christie: It is my understanding that there was some stuff that family could participate in, so I didn't know if your whole family (oh, yeah), would join in.

Charles: We've gone to parties and things that they'd have. Yeah, the whole family was invited. And at Christmas time they always threw parties for the kids. And they was just constantly doing stuff for the people that worked there.

Christie: Now were you, in management as a crew leader (mmm-hmm), you were an hourly worker, though. (yeah) So did you...did you find that you had friends that were mostly hourly workers? (yeah, they all were) They all were. I didn't, I was wondering about any kind of relationships that went on between the salary and the hourly. If that was good relations or (oh, yes)....

Charles: Especially our bosses. They couldn't be good enough to you. (really?) Yeah.

Christie: So what uh, what year did you say you started there? ('62) Sixty-two. So there was the Vietnam War going on at that time. (yeah) Did that affect you personally (well...) or your work?

Charles: One of the guys that I worked with, his son was killed. (really)

Christie: Did...did the plant do anything different because of the war? (no, it run right on) I was wondering if they lost uh, some of their men that must have had to leave.

Charles: Well...not too many of 'em I don't think. There might have been two or three, but that's about all. (mmm-hmm) [coughs]

Christie: It's also my understanding that the plant changed ownership or management a number of times. It was Brockway....

Charles: Well, one time. And that just happened oh...probably six or eight years back before I left. And they bought out Brockway Glass, and went from Owens-Illinois to Owens-Brockway.

Christie: Did that change things for you or at the plant?

Charles: No, we kept, all our jobs stayed the same, but it changed the plant.

Christie: In what ways did it change the plant?

Charles: Well, they shut down the corrugated department, and...up where they made their own boxes and everything. I think that was...started to help the fight to go downhill.

Christie: Starting with the corrugated? Did they make any other changes?

Charles: Well, they brought in a lot of their supervision from Brockway.

Christie: So you had new bosses? (yes) Did you personally have a new boss? (yes) You did? So that, that caused a lot of tension then? (yeah, it sure did) Uh...so when you retired uh, did you keep, do you keep in touch with some of your friends from the plant?

Charles: Oh, yeah, yeah, every Thursday we meet down at Shoney's for breakfast, a bunch of us do.

Christie: Someone else was telling me that. I can't remember who it was. Uh...they had, I guess they had a lot of like sports activities in the earlier days. Did they have that when you...were there?

Charles: In the early days. Well, it was just fading out when I went there, so.... (why did they....) Now this guy that just left here, he played ball for them.

Christie: What was his name?

Charles: Franklin Stevens.

Christie: And he played baseball? (softball) Softball.

Charles: I guess they won a lot of championships.

Christie: Uh, well, since you had a wife and two children...did you have uh, any problems balancing home and work?

Charles: No, just, she took care of the house and I worked a lot of times sixteen hours a day so....

Christie: Did you really? Did you work shift work?

Charles: When I went, shipping department I did. But when I went on the other jobs it was straight shift. (it was)

Christie: Uh...were there mostly men in your department or were there some women?

Charles: We had four or five women I think. (in maintenance) Yeah, and the rest of 'em was men.

Christie: What kind of work did they do? Was it different?

Charles: Matrons.

Christie: What is that?

Charles: They take care of all the janitor work, the women. Then some of our guys had to do janitor work, too.

Christie: Were those women there when you started? Or were they hired after?

Charles: Yeah, they was there when I went there.

Christie: They were? Yeah. Were you friends with them?

Charles: Yeah. (yeah) Everybody got along real good.

Christie: Uh...well, did they, and they had the same opportunities then to change jobs.

Charles: Yeah. You could bid on any job in the plant.

Christie: What did they do, post the jobs (the jobs) that were available?

Charles: Un-huh. You could bid on them and then seniority took 'em from there. If you had seniority to get it you got it.

Christie: So there weren't any problems with you know, men and women (no, un-huh) competing for jobs. (no) Uh, what about blacks? Were there blacks in your department?

Charles: No, we didn't have any our department. But they were just, there were six or eight in the plant, I guess.

Christie: Did you know any of them personally? (yeah) How did uh...how did they feel about opportunities? Do you know? Do you think they had the same kind of opportunities?

Charles: Oh, yeah, everybody had the same. We were union protected, see. If you had enough seniority, you had as much rights as anybody. Men and women and blacks, or whoever.

Christie: Uh, did, were you active in the union?

Charles: Yeah, everybody belonged.

Christie: What kind of stuff did you do?

Charles: Oh, I didn't have to take no part in it. I just paid union dues [laughing].

Christie: Did you ever go on strike, though?

Charles: Yeah, we were out on time for fifty-one days and got a penny more than what they offered.

Christie: Oh, you're kidding? That's all you got. (yeah)

Charles: So we didn't really gain nothing there.

Christie: So you were out on strike, you weren't there? (yeah) Did you do anything else with the union? Do you remember any other activities or ...?

Charles: No, I didn't have, hold an office or anything.

Christie: Uh...[pause]...so your friends that are outside of, that you see outside of the plant, what kinds of stuff did you do with them?

Charles: While we were at work?

Christie: While you weren't at work.

Charles: While were not at work. (right) Well, we'd just all get together and just talk, talk about how good things used to be and what they are now.

Christie: Well, you were the supervisor over all them, though, right? (yeah) So were they shift workers? (uh-huh) So you got to meet everyone (yeah) because the shifts would change all the time. (yeah) Where I guess when you're on shift it would be more difficult.

Charles: Yeah, 'cause there'd be some people that you'd never see.

Christie: So when you were on shift work in the shipping department, was it a lot different? (oh, yeah) Were your friends mostly people that were in the shipping, I mean, in your uh, shift?

Charles: Yeah, the people that you, that were on your shift. (right) But when you went on day shift you had a chance to get to know about everybody.

Christie: And you said you got along with most everyone. (oh, yeah) Uh...did you feel like the union uh, changed things a lot?

Charles: No, I don't think the union did. Everything pretty much stayed the same. Everyone...I felt they protected a lot of people that shouldn't have been protected.

Christie: Meaning what?

Charles: People who wouldn't do their jobs.... It...to fire yourself over there you had to do it yourself. They wouldn't do it. So (mmmh).

Christie: Did the union ever do anything that helped you personally or hurt you personally?

Charles: No, they never hurt me. In fact, they, I never did have to use 'em...in all the time I was there. (mmmh)

Christie: Did, so you don't really felt like they made a lot of changes (no, un-huh). Not even for like women or for blacks.

Charles: Well, they just made sure that everybody had the same opportunity.

Christie: Did you know of people who were leaders of the union? (oh, yeah) Yes. Uh...well, why don't you tell me a little bit about...is there anything that you wanted to tell me about your experience? Is there any memories that you have that were particularly good or particularly bad?

Charles: Yeah, it's just...the way they would treat the people. They just couldn't be good enough to you when we first went there. It was a real good place to work. I've worked at a lot of places before I went there. I never had another job that compared to this one.

Christie: Do you remember why you started working at Owens?

Charles: More money. [laughter] (More money?) More money.

Christie: Where were you working before that?

Charles: Kenova Box.

Christie: Kenova Box? (uh-huh) What do they do there?

Charles: More or less just lumber and a hardware store.

Christie: So Owens offered a pretty good pay.

Charles: Yeah. I was working down there for a dollar fifteen cents an hour. And I went to the plant for a dollar ninety-seven. So you could see why you'd go. [laughter] Especially with a

family.

Christie: Yeah. Did your wife work? (yeah) Where did she work?

Charles: She works at J.C. Penney. (she's still working?) Yeah. Yeah, she's been there about thirty year now.

Christie: Wow. So what did you do with the children when you were both at work?

Charles: Well, there were ten year between them. So most of the time we just had one that we had to worry about gettin' a babysitter for, so....

Christie: You didn't have any problems with that?

Charles: No, because uh, we lived close to her mom and dad when the oldest one was born, and they watched him so.... Then when the second one was born we had to get a babysitter for her.

Christie: Where are they now?

Charles: One of 'em lives here in town and the other one lives in Mansfield, my daughter lives in Mansfield, Ohio.

Christie: Neither of them ever worked at the plant?

Charles: No.

Christie: Did they go to school here?

Charles: Yeah.

Christie: Where did you go to school?

Charles: Buffalo (Buffalo).

Christie: Did you ever get additional training from the plant, or classes?

Charles: No. But you could have took training and they would pay for it, (right), if you made a passing grade. I never did. I didn't figure I'd ever need it, so....

Christie: And you didn't need it to move up in the plant. (no)

Charles: No, you didn't need it.

Christie: So how did your uh, promotion and pay increases work? Did they do that annually? (mmm-hmm, every year) And you bid on the position to be crew leader?

Charles: Yeah. And then there was other jobs in the plant that paid more money than what it did, so, if you didn't like it and wanted to get out, you could go anywhere in the plant you wanted.

Christie: Okay. Well, that sounds like, sounds like you were very happy working there.

Charles: Oh, yeah.

Christie: Except where maybe some things changed in the last few years that you were there.

Charles: Last year, two years you were there it went straight down hill.

Christie: In any particular way?

Charles: Well, mostly supervision.

Christie: Is that why you decided to retire?

Charles: Yeah, yeah, that was it. And I had health reasons, too, so I had to get out.

Christie: Well, speaking of health reasons, did you think, did you ever have any injuries at work?

Charles: Yeah (you did?) un-huh. (what happened?) Uh, me and a boy was on a tractor, we started through...it was in the winter time, and we had strings that you pulled to let the doors go up and down, we thought we were closing the door behind us and we let the one down right in front of us and uh, the overhead door comes down and hits me in the top of the head, cut off my left [inaudible] and it just messed me up proper and.....

Christie: So you were out of work for a while. (yeah, it was all covered by state compensation) That's good. Mmmh. That's the only injury you ever had? (yeah, major) Yeah. How did the, how did the plant handle that? Did they give you time off? (yeah) And did you see a doctor before you had to come back? (mmm-hmm) How long were you off? Do you remember?

Charles: I think about three or four months. (wow)

Christie: And did the plant have it's own doctor or did you have to see your doctor?

Charles: Yeah, we had a plant doctor. (you did?) Yeah.

Christie: Did you have to see him regularly?

Charles: No, we just had to see him when we came back to work. He

had to okay it. (okay) Your doctor outside had to give you a release to come back to work, then you had to go in front of him and if he okay'd it, you'd come back. And if he didn't, you stayed off 'til he said you could come back.

Christie: So did you feel ready when you went? And they didn't have any problems? (no) Well, because you got injured did you think there was like...was that common? Did people get hurt a lot, just because of the nature of the business?

Charles: Well...not too many. They mostly on take rebuilds when they rebuilt furnaces over there, they'd have more injuries than they would any other time, so.... That's because they had a lot of inexperienced people back there working.

Christie: Really? Well, that sounds like a pretty dangerous job (it is). What did they do when they did the paint

Charles: They'd tear 'em all down and rebuild 'em back.

Christie: Now are those really hot? (yeah) Right.

Charles: They were.

Christie: Before we turned the tape on you were talking about how big, how many employees worked there when you first started, and how that went down so much.

Charles: Whenever I went there in '62 I think there were 2100 and some few people. And had thirty-one machines running. Now that uh, in ninety-two there were less than five hundred people and eight machines running.

Christie: Wow. Why did they cut back so much? Do you know?

Charles: I really couldn't say. It's...just lost the business, I guess. (mmmh) Probably a cheaper glass coming in in the United States.

Christie: Did they get a lot of tech-, new technology?

Charles: Yeah. They had all up-to-date machines, all gauging equipment, everything, all real modernized. It really shocked me when they shut it down. I figured they would sooner or later, but not when they did.

Christie: Oh, you didn't see it coming right away? (no) So you must have still been friends with a lot of people that were, laid off (yeah, still...laid off, still working, too, so...) Yeah.

Charles: It hurt. And right now it, it's, all the unemployment's about run out for the people over there it's really goin' bad now.

Christie: Yeah. Do you ever talk to them about what they're going to do?

Charles: Yeah, some of 'em's found jobs. A few. They've all had to leave here, leave West Virginia, to find jobs.

Christie: Have they really? (yeah) Not finding anything in Huntington. (no)

Charles: There's not too much here now to find a job at. (yeah)

Christie: Well, what kind of, did you get benefits when you retired? (yeah) What kind of benefits?

Charles: We draw a pension from the plant plus...among social security, too.

Christie: So none of that gets affected by the plant closing. (no) What about the people who were there? Do you know?

Charles: If they had uh, thirty years time in and 55 years old, they could draw a pension. I think out of the five hundred some that was left at the plant, two hundred and some of 'em got pensions and the rest of 'em didn't. They just had to take their severance pay.

Christie: Mmmh. That must be really tough. Were you at the plant...I heard there was a big fire there one time, but I guess that was over at the warehouse. Tobacco Warehouse. (yeah) Do you know anything about that?

Charles: I was working at the plant when it burnt down. (were you?) Mmm-hmm.

Christie: I heard they had their own fire station, their firemen and everything there. (yeah, sure did) Did they have fires all the time or just...?

Charles: Yeah, it was mostly on the hot end where all the so much grease and oil and stuff that was back there that would catch on fire and burn. But it really helped, instead of hurting anything. [laughter]

Christie: I guess the fire people were actually people who worked at the plant. (mmm-hmm, yeah) They weren't the county. (no, un-huh, they were our people) Was that, that was their job or did they just do that extra?

Charles: It was just extra. If they had a fire, then they quit whatever they was doing and go fight fires. [laughing]

Christie: Mmmh. Well, I didn't have any more, too many more

specific questions. I just...thought if you had any stories about anything that you remember that you want other people to know about....

Charles: No, I can't think of anything.

Christie: [pause] Well, I guess that's about it then. Thank you so much.

Charles: All righty.

END OF INTERVIEW