

**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #552
ZEIDERS, Vivian**

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Description of interviewee: Vivian Zeiders was employed at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company from 1976 until 1982 when she was laid off. She worked in the Finishing department and worked all the jobs that were included within the department. She was one of three females and her experiences are included below.

Interviewed: June 6, 2017
Interviewer: Alex Windham
Index by: Alex Windham
Length: 00:34:02

Abstract: In her June 6, 2017 interview with Alex Windham, Vivian Zeiders detailed her thoughts and memories of his time at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company referred to locals as the Bleachery. Zeiders spoke of the time period of the 1970s through 2017 and on the follow topics: race relations, day to day job responsibilities and actions, technology changes, worker attitudes, the decline of the Bleachery, family, her other occupations up until the year 2017. Zeiders also offered her opinions on the Bleachery compared to other textile jobs. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Springs, race, seniority, gender relations

Interview Session (June 6, 2017): Digital File

Time Keywords,

00:00:00 *Start of Interview and Introduction*

When she first started in 1976 in the Finishing department, she said that there was only one woman in the entire department. A majority of the department were white males. There were only two men that gave Vivian and her other female coworkers problems. She said that otherwise the men taught them how to do their job. Once the men got used to the idea that women would work hard in the department they were accepted.

00:03:07 Her responsibilities within the Finishing department began with mixing the finishing compound. Also, she made softener for fabrics both finishing compound and the softener were mixed in large tanks that fed into the machines. She said that it was a constant job to keep the machines stocked with the chemicals. She also during her time at the Bleachery drove a forklift.

00:04:45 She had to bid for the forklift job after being at the Bleachery for a while. She said it was a relief job because she had to relieve everyone in the department and through this process she learned all the jobs in the Finishing department. Her work would then be sent to the Napping department to be napped. (process which

strengthens and gives cloth better durability) She said that the next location for production of her finished product was dependent on the circumstance.

00:05:54 Vivian came from a family that extensively worked in the textile industry. She was influenced heavily by her family working in the industry and also because in Rock Hill and the surrounding area textiles were the dominant employer.

00:06:30 She mentioned that the Bleachery was a more family oriented than Springs in Chester and also Celanese other textile plants that she worked in. She mentioned that she did not know the reason the Bleachery was so family oriented but it could have been due to it being a union plant.

00:07:30 The influence of being family oriented she mentioned that Joslin Park was used exclusively by the workers of the Bleachery. Her father took her as a kid to Joslin Park. The park had swing sets, swimming and shuffleboard. She mentioned that there would be Sunday picnics that the Bleachery workers would get together and have dinners. She mentioned jukeboxes and places to dance and locations to take the boat and places to swim in the Lake Wylie. Joslin Park would be a place she would frequent when she was young. The Bleachery was very influential and affected most people in Rock Hill because in most neighborhoods someone, if not several people, worked at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company. Most families in the area where she grew up (downtown Rock Hill, SC) had at least one person who worked in the plant.

00:10:00 She gained a strong work ethic from working at the plant, which translated to her future jobs in the industry. On average, she would work eight to ten hours a day and if overtime were an option she would do that too.

00:10:28 She expressed that since she started in the 1970s, a time that was the beginning of the Bleachery's decline, it went unnoticed at first. However as she progressed through the 1970s, she began to notice the decline because she was laid off several times, and the Bleachery would call her back to work.

00:11:07 She was a union member but she never had to file a grievance. Her dad was part of a strike in the 1950s and she said that the union provided the strikers with baskets of beans, flour and sugar. This was because the union supported the strikers' basic needs while they were not being paid by the company. Also, the union helped her father a lot. She did not work at there she felt, long enough, to really need the union, but she felt a sense of security because they were there if she needed them.

00:12:09 She said she did not have much interaction with African Americans while working at the Bleachery and she mentioned that Bleachery workers rarely left the area where their respective departments were. She did not remember hearing about African Americans applying for a job and not getting that job. Her predominately-white department limited her perspective on racial relations.

00:13:23 She was discriminated against due to her gender but after a while those issues subsided. She did mention that when she began driving forklift, which was a traditionally man's job that she was catcalled and picked at initially. She learned how to drive it and then she was given "all thumbs up". The men she worked with were her father's age and they knew her father so they did not issue long. She felt that once things worked themselves out the issues subsided and it was a factor that the men she worked with had children her age and they too could be working there so she was given encouragement and support. The men that did give her issues were older than her father was and felt that their routine of showering (a system that they had rigged up without the company's consent) would be messed up, but Vivian would wait until they finished and then go to her workstation. She was polite and respectful as her parents had taught her and this helped her, along with bringing the older men snacks.

00:16:30 She felt that the next generation, who did not want to work in textiles and had an attitude, may have impacted the decline of the Bleachery as well. She recollected her times working for Springs and how the initial training group of fifteen that she came to work with dwindled down to two because the workers did not want to work that long and stand up that long. She said that attitude change in workers and also the change that the economy had where people wanted to get stuff cheaper (products and labor) contributed to the decline in the textile industry.

00:17:31 In the finishing department automation was limited because most of the technology remained relatively the same in her department.

00:18:45 The older people did not know what they were going to do because they had been working in textiles their entire lives and did not think that they would be hired in other places due to their limited skill set. The majority of people in the South worked in textiles and this focus on a single industry caused issues once the plants began closing down.

00:20:00 She left the Bleachery in 1982 and she mentioned that her final months were noted by a slowing down of production and she was laid off because she did not have seniority. She said she did not think the Bleachery would call her because it was in decline and so she left for another job. The Bleachery always wanted the most senior workers to stay on. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing did not pay her any severance because she did not have enough years in. She could have collected unemployment but she went instead to the Catherine Mill owned by Springs in Chester, South Carolina.

00:21:40 Springs was very different from M. Lowenstein especially outside the Bleachery because the Catherine Mill in Chester was not unionized. She said that the workers did not have a scheduled break, and if you got behind while taking a break it was your responsibility to get caught back up. The demand of the Weaving department where she worked, was high and she mentioned that once the training period was over, all the remaining training and assistance stopped. She remained at Springs' Chester mill until 1987 and she then went to work for Mack Truck. She worked extensively in textiles as she worked at Celanese in Rock Hill prior to her employment at the Bleachery and when she left the Catherine Mill she never returned to the textile industry.

00:22:40 She compared Celanese and Springs and the Bleachery. The impact of the union at both Celanese and the Bleachery may have in her opinion been better than Springs because in the previous locations the workers had rights. She did say that Springs was not horrible because the all had their bad points and good points.

00:25:50 The Bleachery was a good place to work and Vivian enjoyed her time spent there, but she mentioned that a bad point was the layoffs. Those with less seniority had a difficult time in the series of layoffs because they were the first to be laid off.

00:26:31 The outside influences from nonunion goods impacted her childhood. In her home when she was a kid if it did not have a made in the USA label on it her family had to take it back because her father and mother supported the union. She said that products that claim to be made in the United States, that often this is not the case. This impact of not protecting the American textile worker in her opinion was negative.

00:28:24 Following her time as a textile worker, Vivian went to Mack Truck where she painted semi-trucks or 18-wheelers. She also worked on the assembly line doing carpeting, wiring. She mentioned that doing this job had a certain time limit and she had to quickly get a task done and get out of the way of the next worker on the line. She worked for Mack Truck from 1987 until 2002. She explained that she jumped from one world into an entirely different one.

00:30:00 The closing of the Bleachery had a major effect on Rock Hill. It created a massive loss of jobs. This also impacted the Celanese plant which also shut down. She was sad to see the Bleachery close because she and basically her entire family had been employed in textiles.

00:31:26 She has not been in contact with her coworkers from the Bleachery because most of them have passed away because she was in her twenties and they were in their forties and fifties.

00:32:47 She feels that the fact that they are planning to use the Bleachery in the development of Knowledge Park is a positive thing for Rock Hill, and also it is positive that they are using existing buildings rather than tearing them all down.

00:33:40 Vivian summed up her time at the Bleachery by saying that it was a good place to work because it was family oriented and also because it gave people the chance to meet and work together.

00:34:02 *End of Interview*