
S.D. Warren Company

Stories of Maine's Paper Plantation


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Interview with Dave Martin & Arthur Gordon

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Dave Martin 7/18/03

Track 5

Getting a job through persistence (0:15-0:40)

Track 6

Midnight shift: because that's just about what you felt like, one foot in the grave and one on a banana peel. 0:17 Set up – absolutely hated b/c of heat 0:37; 0:37 everybody hated the day shift b/c supervisors were there/they made best paper at night because no supervisors around. 1:00

1:20 We used to be able to tell by touch what the water content of the paper was; we could tell the thickness, and come pretty close to the weight of the paper just by hand.

Computers took the skill and pride out of the work “and you were just another number.”

Track 7 Mother Warren “Had a long tradition of treating its employees well.”

0:40 As it grew, and it was merged with other companies, there was a separation – that didn't exist anymore, and you didn't feel the camaraderie you did before.

1:00 “Mother Warren was a protector, a provider; we felt pretty secure with Mother Warren.”

1:10-1:35 - After Scott merger, S.D. Warren picked up Muskegon, Mobile, Somerset – “control left Westbrook, or the Boston Office” – and got spread out some things that might work in Washington wouldn't work here but we had to do it. 1:40 “IT was frustrating, but because it was a bigger company we had to do it.

2:10 “Of course the mill, gave us a sense of security. YK, you had a future to look forward too. Mother Warren, especially back when it was Mother Warren, it was kind of like ‘cradle-to-grave.’ I mean, you knew you were going to be all right.

But when it was no longer Mother Warren, and they merged with these different companies, well, that prospect went right out the window, and you didn't feel quite so secure.

2:33 And there was resentment, among the younger people and the older people who had been there for a number of years, because you pretty much had to wait for somebody to die, or retire, before you could move up. And there got to be some resentment there.

HEAT:

2:53 [The worst thing about working there] Probably the heat. Probably, the heat. (laughs) Oh, it got ungodly hot in there. And of course, the chemicals we used in the coating there – the smells, the aromas, were terrible, they would gag you. Terrible, terrible. Of course, the engineer would come by with a wand there, and test the air there, and say everything was fine, and then he'd go outside and throw his guts up. But we had to work in it for eight hours a day. There was some bad times.

3:30 Story about spending a whole day in sheet car. “Technology had its good points too.”

Track 8/Unionization/Lost job/

0:20 Fear of Scott was reason people sought protection of union.

1:15 Got downsized. “Just called us up at 7 am and told us to come to the mill and at 8 am let us go. And that’s not how I wanted it to end.” 2:22 “Took quite a few menial jobs.”

Track 9 * How merging with Scott killed the mill; Critique of corporate capitalism.**

“Westbrook had a world-wide reputation of making some of the best paper in the world, and we always prided ourselves on that. But as they began merging with these bigger companies, and more mills became part of the chain, they started taking our grades of paper and tried to make them in other mills, and they just couldn’t make ‘em like we did. And the quality suffered immensely, and eventually business got so bad for those particular grades that they just took them off the market, they disappeared. And I felt real bad about that, because we used to make some beautiful, beautiful paper. And when they found it wouldn’t work some other place, why they never brought it back, I don’t know. That’s one of the problems with making decisions in Philadelphia for a mill that’s in Westbrook Maine.

Track 10/Room sounds.

Disk Two

Track 2 Tells story of how Jointness was poorly implemented. Training in Philadelphia on how to be nice to front-line workers. Team philosophy. He had always approached it this way. The training was only for supervisors – top mill managers had not been trained.

Track 3 Story of being forced by upstairs to discipline his employee for going to uncle's funeral

Track 4 Howard Reiche in 88/89 told everyone on salary was telling everyone that the mill was about to shrink; Dave Martin didn't believe it was going to affect him.

Describes how he had approached sharing his info with his employees, others were in conflict with other supervisors.

Track 5

Howard Reiche was the last of the good mill managers. He knew everybody by name.

0:26 Hank Rona was a hatchet man. He could walk by you 50 times and not know your name or who you were.

Track 7 It didn't trickle down, top mill management weren't trained and led to animosity "Who's in control here?"

1:31 Division manager – exception, Earl Murray, wasn't college graduated.

2:30 Impact of Scott managers coming in up top "upsetting the apple cart" created a lot of confusion.

Track 8

Why the mill declined: it was planned. Refers to George Orwell, 1984.

1:30 Computers were wrong. Lost money, junked paper. Wouldn't allow supervisors/workers' .

Maybe by listening to us, they could have speeded up, but they wouldn't listen to us.