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S.D. Warren Company

Stories of Maine's Paper Plantation

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## Interview with Harry Foote

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Harry Foote (and son Ray Foote) July 10, 2002

- Very good on transition of Westbrook from insular community (esp. quote on Disk Two) to just a suburb of Greater Portland.

- Mill donated funds to keep American Journal going in 1965 (Dsk 1, Tr 2, 5:00). Roger Snow got SDW and other larger mills to buy large number of 1/2 price subscriptions, to allow paper to continue to run

- Mill as “friend”/Mother Warren (Dsk1,Tr2,9:00) around 9:40 - “everybody thought of Warren as a friend. If you lived in Westbrook, or were in business in Westbrook, Warren was your friend. You felt that, when things got tough, they could help you, or suggest a way to help... They were out to help.”

- two past stories on unions [e.g. 1977 strike]

- Walker has a good microfilm collection of American Journal; and

- On why the mill unionized: “The workers saw the trend towards consolidation in the paper business, and on a national level reacted to realize that they would be beyond benevolence, they’d be into a blood and guts fight with the competitors, and that they needed national affiliation to withstand what was coming... A worker reaction to corporate amalgamation.” Trck 2, 12-14

- On shift from Republican to Democratic town in the 1970s. Trck 2, min 15-16

“Many people in city office when I came were S.D. Warren employees at the mill. Obviously, [the mill] nurtured that idea that if you were a capable person they would welcome your participation as an elected or an appointed person on a city board and in city activities - fire department, police department, whatever it was ... And the presence of some of the better people at the mill in city government may have carried with it a republican tinge, and I’m under the impression that the mill did nothing direct ever in how to vote or how to act, it never to my knowledge tell them what to do. There did not seem to be a Warren position on public issues. And, why and how they shift to Democratic - and I agree that there was a shift, I don’t quite know. It might have been a single person, Bill Garr...(?) It might be - that is a little hard to explain.”

- Shift in how town ran?

“Yeah, I guess so. Much more willing to spend money.” Foote and his wife lived in Westbrook around 49/50. Streets were paved with a cheaper cinder from coal waste from mill back then; other cities/towns had converted to paving the road. “Westbrook in those days, did things the cheap way, the economical way. And under the more modern regime - I have never connected this with Republican/Democrat - but it is probably part of that general change. Went into debt more heavily, spend more.”

- How obvious was ethnic identity in the community?

“Very. TV killed it. TV taught the kids, this is the way to talk. Until then, you talked

pretty much the way your folks did, parents. And if that was French, you at the least learned it - whether you practiced it or not. Came TV - the schools were all except in English, except. St. H was still going, the Nuns still taught in French. ... And I've developed in the last five to ten years a great, deep respect for the French. Very honest, hard--Working, undemonstrative. They hide almost. They're they hide their Frenchness. And they were not an excluding group, whatever. All they did pretty much, they knew each other, they were adventurous, exploring business people. The best businesses in westbrook were French-owned and French-developed." Q: An example?  
"A.H. Benoit. You don't think of that as a Westbrook business but they started in Westbrook. And expanded into Portland and up the coast. The Men Shop, which died with urban renewal. Supported it and died with it..."

Any sense of ethnic identity among the non-French?

"Irish Hill, Scotch Hill. ... By 1965 there was no longer any core group who acted with any identity... They weren't hanging together very much. And the rest of Westbrook was either French, or non-French." This says very succinctly that the only ethnic identity remaining by the 1960s was Franco.

### **People to Contact**

-Phil C. Rondeau - one of two in Windham. Was President of City Council (Republican) and also a high-level accounting office manager/finance executive in the mill.

-Roger V. Snow - owned American Journal for about 12 years (roughly 1953-1965) before sold to Foote. He was later Bob Caswell's predecessor at USM. H. Foote said that he would know a bunch about SDW Co.