



Orleans County Historical Association

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Orleans County Historical

Association

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Richard Colville Burroughs
122 Platt Street
Albion, New York

Richard Burroughs was born June 29, 1927.

Interviewed by Mrs. Marjorie Radzinski of Albion, N.Y.

B Burroughs

R Radzinski





Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Edmund B. [Signature]
Signed
7/14/80
Date

Understood and agreed to:

Maryjane C. Radzinski
INTERVIEWER
7/14/80
Date

R I, Marjorie Radzinski, am conducting an interview with Richard Burroughs of 122 Platt Street in Albion, Orleans County, New York.

Dick has worked at Lipton's in Albion since 1948. I feel that he has seen many changes and has experienced many events during his employment at Lipton's which reflect our county's growth.

Dick, would you begin by telling me some of your background and the events leading to your decision to go to work at Lipton's ?

B I was born in Ohio and I grew up in Connecticut. (See PAGE 12). My family moved here when I was in the service, and my dad was coming back to his old stamping grounds, and so I moved up and joined them. My dad was familiar with this area because he went to high school here, and my grandfather was a minister in Gaines so it was their home area. I worked two years with my dad and my uncle cutting lumber and apple butts. We were making wood for crates for Harrison-Radiator, and things like that. By the time the war was over quite a while, the Canadian companies were getting back in cutting lumber SO that business disbanded. I got the idea that I might want to go back to Connecticut where I had gone to school, so I went to Lipton's and started a job, a temporary job at that time, so I could earn enough money to go back to Connecticut and go into other things. And somehow or another it turned into a little more permanent job because I got involved with sports teams and got married, and by the time I went back to WOODMONT, Connecticut I didn't like that anymore. So I got used to the area.

R I guess you have answered one of my questions. What do you recall of the events that led to Lipton's moving one of their plants to the Albion location ? I guess you did not touch on that.

B Well it was Continental Foods when I joined it and they were making Chicken Noodle Soup which I imagine Lipton's developed - - well I'm not sure if Continental Foods developed it or Lipton's did - - but they were here when I started and they were running Potato Flour; making it for shipment to Russia and overseas. So they were surviving on Army contracts, and some TVN, and Chicken Noodle Soup, which were the first soups they ever made. From that they developed different products and pretty soon they changed their name to Lipton's which they were part of anyway. But just how and when that developed I'm not quite sure, but all of a sudden we were getting checks from Lipton's instead of from Continental Foods.

R What other companies have been acquired by Lipton's through the years and what products have they produced for market ?

B Well I think the most important one is Wish Bone Salad Dressing. It was one of the first and one of the most important and it was a very strong line in the company, the Wish Bone. We picked up Good Humor Ice Cream and tried to expand that but that stayed regional, so on the east coast there's Good Humor Ice Cream. They picked up Morton House Canning Company and Nebraska City they put out Chile-con-carne, beans - - Baked beans and other canned products which are fairly good, but they are only a limited local market. Of course Lipton Tea was always the main product and the main source of revenue I guess. They picked up Tabby Cat Food and I guess they closed the original plant and branched off a couple of other plants of cat food. They picked up a noodle plant in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and I can't remember the name of that plant.

R Was it Pennsylvania Dutch ?

B Pennsylvania Dutch, that's the brand name.

R Negg's, was it ?

B Megg's Pennsylvania Dutch Noodles, yes. And they

picked up some ethnic food companies in ^{MOONACHIE,} New Jersey;
 A. SOHADI & Co., I think they make spices and some
 particular foods in - - - I think he's got men in
 Armenian backgrounds so it's Armenian and Turkish
 specialty items. They picked up - - the last one
 I think was LAWRY'S Foods of California that makes a
 Garlic Salt and I guess that's a very popular food
 in the south and southwest. I think that's the latest
 acquisition; probably an important one too.

R Dick why don't you go on and tell me what you can
 about your life at Lipton's.

B Well I started there at about 19 and the starting wage
 at that time was about 82½¢ an hour. (c. 1946).

R That isn't much is it ?

B It covered the expenses at that time. In comparison
 to the starting wage today would be probably \$6. 35.
 so it's quite a gap in 32 years.

R I guess so.

B What I started doing was peeling potatoes. We'd dump
 a 100 pound bag of potatoes in a sluice and run it
 through a machine and that would spin it like a
 washing machine and wear off the peels. Then they
 would run it over a belt and dice them up and cook
 them and make a flake out of it that we would grind
 into flour. We used to put out 100,000 pounds of
 that a day. That was for shipment to Russia and
 overseas. Then after that there was other products
 that they ran over the dryers that would go in their
 TYN Soup. Their Onion Soup when they developed that
 later, they needed products for that; so the main
 department that I involved in was the Dryer Department.
 Every fall we'd run the tomatoes and then you'd have
 about six weeks of 12 to 18 hour days, sometimes 7
 days a week; ~~and~~ very frustrating but it was something
 you would look forward to because it was a big pay-
 check at that time, and there was a lot of comradery,
~~because~~ everybody was working late hours and they
 seemed to enjoy it through that time, but after the
 six weeks everybody welcomed the relief from all

that pressure at that time.

R Yes, I imagine.

B They seemed to enjoy those long hours for a short period, I guess because of the paychecks.

R While we are on that subject; what type of persons went to work at Lipton's at first? were there many married women hired, and did the men leave the farms to go to work?

B Yes, quite a few married women. They'd go in and work in the fall in tomatoes and then a few of them would stay during the rest of the year and work on the soup packaging machines. There were a lot of part-time-farmers that would come in the fall and work through the winter, ~~and~~ Then in the spring they would go out back on their farms again. So it accommodated the company and it accommodated some of the private businesses and some of the people that worked there. Employment was something like 150 in the summer and 300 in the winter. That developed up to the present time of about 500 - - 490 people, I guess at the present time. But there was a lot of lay-offs. You would work for a short period and then get layed off and then go back to work again. For the people that were married, it was a way to get part time work and for a few it was full time work. But it evolved so that finally the work force stayed very steady and we didn't have the lay-offs that we had before so consequently a lot of people had full time work.

During those tomato seasons, we made ketchup and puree, and dried our own flakes which we put in TVN Soup. The ketchup and purees we put up for other companies to their specifications and put their labels on them so we didn't have a Lipton's label, although there was a Continental Food label for some of the ketchup. In 1960 or shortly before, they went out of the fresh tomato business because California produced tomatoes a lot cheaper and a lot more free from mold and rot. So we could finally

purchase our tomato paste in large drums and run it any time of the year we wanted to. That did away with this rush in the fall of the year when we had to tie up people and machinery just for the tomato season, fresh pack. That helped to even off the employment a lot too. It got away from the seasonal work.

R How about the Poultry Department ?

B I'm not sure what year it started but it started on the second floor, and we built up to about 8000 pounds of poultry a day which we thought was quite a bit. In 1960 we built a new poultry facility on the third floor and right away we jumped our production to about 30,000 pounds a day so we really jumped our production then! At the same time we put in some new freeze-dryers which was a new type of drying. You would freeze the product and then you'd take the water out under vacuum so it wouldn't dry into a hard piece of material and when you added the water back you had almost the same thing that you started with so that was quite a break through on our chicken pieces. They picked a big head of steam about that time, when the freeze-dryers came in, and the big poultry facility started.

R About how many women were employed up in the Poultry Department ?

B We had as many as 30 but ~~24 is about~~ - - - 26 is our maximum. We varied between 18 and 26 over the years. Sometimes it was a little higher, sometimes it was a little lower. There was about 26 women and 20 men on three shifts to keep it going for that department.

R How about the machinery that was used at first and any improvements that were seen as time went on ?

B We started out with Roller Dryers, 4 Roller Dryers; and over the years we purchased three newer ones. I guess the older ones held up as good as the new ones. They are a great big gigantic piece of equipment and they have done a good job over the years for all our flake products. Now they have decided that operation

is obsolete, which is one reason for the plant closing down. They figure there is new and different processes that can do the job better and cheaper.

The Freeze-dryers were a new and very technical piece of equipment, but they are pretty obsolete now because they had to be hand-loaded and hand-unloaded. ~~and~~ They do have more modern techniques of loading a whole rack of material in there on a hoist, instead of pushing all the trays in by hand; so they are obsolete now too.

R How about the Conglomerator ?

B The Conglomerator they have decided to phase out too because you moisten pieces of material like peas or mushroom soup and then you explode dry it; so you get a piece of material that is very soft, ~~It~~ will rehydrate very quickly. You don't have to wait a long time for it to become soup. But they had new and different products that would take the place of that, so that's gone out of style too.

R How about the Bartell Machines in production ?

B Bartells will continue but that production will go to Flemington, New Jersey. As soon as the dryers and processers goes out, then it is not profitable to keep just the packaging machines here because you have to ship all the raw materials in for it. ~~and~~ As long as processers were here, it was very profitable to make soup here but not after the processing goes out. ~~and~~ That's the main reason it is closing. But these soups will be made in Flemington, and maybe a few in California. Lot of the different products we made and developed over the years were Frosty Ice Cream that you would make in your refrigerator ice-cube trays. ~~and~~ That had a short life. We have made soup and gravies for the Army contracts, Soft drinks for the Army which we package. We've made Chicken Noodle, TVN Soups, chicken pastes and quite a few Army contracts over the years. This was another devise to keep the employment up during the slow periods. That was the big reason for it. It wasn't the idea of making so much money - - you know everybody wants to make money but to keep the employment evened out over the years.

- R Which they were pretty successful in doing.
- B The past decade I think they were very good at it. They had a couple bad up and downs, but mostly it was very good.
- R Did the water and the sewerage have anything to do with them phasing out of Albion ?
- B Spokesmen for the company have denied it. I see no reason to disbelieve that denial because I don't think it had a difference. The closing had been rumored for five years, ten years and whatever. Five years ago they decided that they might want to close the plant, and we reviewed it. Our people here, I think, showed them where it was economical to keep it here and they accepted that. Then, I guess, they reviewed it again and some factories changed processing costs and changes, but I don't think the water and sewer had anything to do with it - - very little.
- R What do you think the general morale is of the people now that they are phasing out ?
- B Generally it is very good, I thought. I think, maybe the newspapers interviewed the right people. It could have been different if they got somebody that had a negative approach. You get a few perturbed stories in the paper and other people pick it up; but the people that they interviewed had a fairly positive attitude about it and I think everybody took it fairly well. For a long time though it was a shock; you would see depression and what-not in everybody - - - in everybody's faces, and I could feel it myself. Then even when you turned around and find out what you were going to do or find you still got a job in the company, some people did, some didn't, they have gone to other jobs. But even now you can see where people are now resigned to it, they're a little more carefree and casual, they aren't drawn out like they were before. They've accepted it. Then, of course, you have to try to keep your standards up which is a little difficult but it's

being done and people are co-operating very well. But, you can see now they have lost that dragged-out feeling so they're perking up a little bit.

R Dick, just what was and is your position at Lipton's ?
What departments have you worked in ?

B I started out as a laborer and so for a year or two I worked up through the operating jobs; and about the third year they offered me a job in the Platform as the Platform Boss which is only unloading trucks with 2 or 3 people; but after 2 or 3 years of that then I was offered a Shift Foreman's job. I think maybe several of the older fellows had turned it down because it was only a 10¢ an hour raise and they said: "Well I'm not going to do that work for that." But it was 10¢ and you can't go any further if you don't take the next step. So I became a regular Shift Foreman. I held that position for quite a few years until my boss retired; he was a Supervisor, and I took his job in 1975. So I have been a Department Supervisor since 1975 and in that department ARE five sub-departments: Freeze-drying, Roller-drying, Poultry and Proctor-air-drying. And there ARE four foremen to help run that department, plus five or six lead-men, and anywhere from 80 to 100 people depending on how heavy we're running.

R You must have had some funny instances or amusing things happen while you were at Lipton's. Can you recall any of them ?

B Oh yes. I think the tomato seasons were a little hectic because there's a lot of cleaning up going and there's always water splashing and high pressure hoses that can really get you going. The guys would have water fights between themselves sometimes.

One time our production manager walked by under a capping machine, and unfortunately for the couple of guys that were squirting each other and the guy that was cleaning up saw these pants, white pants, under the capper so he proceeded to hose him. **H**e heard a yell and he looked up and there was Norm Ross, the



Production Manager. So it was embarrassing for him and not too good for Norm Ross.

Another time a couple of fellows - - one was cleaning out the inside of a tank and the other fellow was using a high pressure hose to clean up the tomato line. So the guy in the tank started yelling and hollering cause he wanted help to get out. The other operator couldn't see anybody, so he decided to put the hose down in a safe place so he could go and see who was hollering. So he turned around and he stuck the hose in the tank and he clamped a lid down on it. So the guy was in the tank with a high pressure hose squirting him. A lot of instances like that happened.



SIDE TWO

- B Over the years, I think Lipton's has been a very fair and even-handed employer. Years ago the racial mark-up wasn't as distinct as it is now. There were very few black families and minorities. There had been blacks employed at one time or another maybe one, two or three until the migrant workers came up here very heavily. When the tomatoes dropped out, the farmers slowed down and there was a big black population which Lipton's started assimilating into the work force. I think over the years that they have done a fairly good job on that. And there has also been a couple of times that there has been Union activity where they have tried to organize the workers. Both times they fizzled because I think the benefits that Lipton offered - - - they tried to keep equal to or better than the prevailing conditions around the area. I think the workers accepted this and decided not to organize only because the company was fair and even in their policies.
- R Could you touch on the entertainment Lipton's has given their employees; for instance picnics, and dances, and bowling teams ?
- B Yes this involves over the years and they've always had at least five or six bowling teams going. In recent years they've been sponsoring Inter-department 5 or 6 basketball teams, a few slow pitch baseball teams and they even have some of these contests in their yearly picnic. This picnic was started at Hamlin Beach, it's gone to Indian Falls, it's gone to Sea Breeze in Rochester and the last few years at the 4-H Fairgrounds in Medina - - - or half-way to Medina. They usually have it the day following the 4-H Fair and they rent the ride facilities for that Sunday. I guess it's been fairly successful

during that time. They also sponsor a Quarter Century Club and every year each employee with 25 years or more service is invited to that. That includes retirees. I guess this will probably be the last party this year unless it's put on by the people themselves.

R Yes.

B Over the years they have had other events. They've had dances, they have a Christmas Party for the children but they used to have occasionally a Christmas Dance or some other activities. They have always tried to keep the fringe benefits going as sports and entertainment and whatever. I guess they encourage that and along with that they encourage people to go back to school. Anybody who wants any further education, they'll pay for it, you know considering if it's something they can use. It isn't necessary that it's something they can use right on their job but something in their future. The company will make arrangements for people to continue their education so that people that want to use this can. So there's quite a few fringes that people can avail themselves of.

R In other words Lipton's has really been an outstanding company to the people's way of thinking, they have really enjoyed working for Lipton's ?

B I think in general there's people that are going to complain about what they're doing no matter - -

R But generally they've been happy to be working at Lipton's ? They felt as though there was an advantage in working there for a small town it was a good place to work.

B Yes, a lot of them would rather work there than go to Kodak, or Rochester Products, or Harrison's, where maybe a couple of dollars wage may be more an hour to be received but they would loose that in the driving time and your gasoline costs.

R And your medical benefits - -

B Were very good.

R They furnished their uniforms and clothing that they used when working there.

B Yes, they have been very good. They would make an effort to go out and search the area and make sure that they are doing as good as anybody else for their employees.

R Do you have any more to say on this subject ?

B I guess I don't. Maybe I would probably think of something later or tomorrow but off-hand I don't have anymore I can really add.

R Well, thank you very much Dick.

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This taped interview was transcribed by Lysbeth Hoffman of Waterport, N.Y.

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Additional information: Richard C. Burroughs:

Father: Luther P. Burroughs

Mother: Ruth Colville Burroughs

Wife: Audrey Jane Bieber Burroughs

Children: Richard Micheal Burroughs

Anita Louise Burroughs

Carol Ann Burroughs

James Patrick Burroughs

Livda Ruth Burroughs

Andrew Brian Burroughs

9-23-'80

Lipton to Close Friday

By DAVID GALANTE

ALBION — Marvin Ettinger had been hoping to move out of the small, one-bedroom apartment that he and his wife Carol now live in.

The Ettingers have been married for two years, and had also hoped to start raising a family. But, the luxury of owning a home and the joy of having children may not be as near as they had dreamed.

Mr. Ettinger and about 350 other people are to be laid off from their jobs at the Thomas J. Lipton Co., which is scheduled to close operations in Albion Friday.

"It seems like there was so many things that we wanted to do," said Mrs. Ettinger. "I guess staying home and taking care of children will have to be put off for a while. It seemed so nice though."

Mr. Ettinger hasn't found another job yet, but said the Lipton Co. has been helpful.

"Lipton has been good about the closing," he said. "I mean they told us far enough in advance. The personnel department has been helpful, too. They've posted job opportunities and even allowed some of us to have interviews during working hours. I have no complaints."

More than 100 Lipton employees have already left the firm to seek other jobs. When the announcement to close the plant was made in April, there were 486 employees on the local payroll. As of today, 358 are still working at the plant.

Mr. Ettinger has been a Lipton employee for almost eight years. He said the severance pay that he'll receive will "be a great help."

The company's policy is to provide one week's pay for every year of service for those who have been working at Lipton for 10 years or less, said Plant Manager Bruce Rex. Those who worked 11 to 20 years will get two weeks' pay for every year they worked more than 10, plus a bonus of 10 weeks' pay.

Those who worked more than 20 years will get three weeks pay for every year they worked more than 20, plus 30 weeks' pay, said Rex.

Workers can also apply for unemployment insurance. The maximum is \$125 a week for at least 26 weeks, according to a spokesman for the Department of Labor. The spokesman also said most Lipton employees will probably qualify for the maximum.

The Lipton Co. will also maintain health care coverage for its employees after the closing. Those who worked five years or less will continue to receive health benefits for three months after the closing. Those who worked more than five years will be covered for six months, or until other employment is found, said Rex.

After Friday, Rex said a "skeleton staff will remain at the plant for a short period for maintenance, office work and shipping of any goods produced prior to closing."

Approximately 100 employees requested transfers to other Lipton facilities after the closing was announced. Rex said that about 30 local employees will be transferring to other facilities — more than half to the plant in Flemington, N.J.

The opportunity to apply for transfer was offered to each employee at the Albion plant, said Rex.

Lipton has recently been negotiating with two other food-making companies over sale or lease of the plant, according to Peter Boyle, production director at Lipton headquarters in Englewood Cliffs, N.J. No agreement has been made, however.

County, regional and state officials have also been working to find a suitable replacement for the Albion plant.

"It was my hope to stay right at the plant," said Ray Babbitt, a Lipton employee for more

than three years. "It's been a super plant to work at. The Albion crews and managers are the best around. I still don't think there's a better place to work than Lipton."

On Friday, every employee will be given a commemorative booklet depicting the history of the Albion plant from 1942-1980, said Rex.

The booklet, which was composed by Process Analyst John Andrews, will include a written history of the plant, candid photos taken over the years and a photograph of every employee to date, assembled by department.

"The book will also include a statement from me detailing my appreciation of all the employees at this plant," said Rex.

At the time of the closing, Lipton had 82 salaried positions and 414 hourly jobs at the Albion plant. The company's local payroll is between \$7 million and \$8 million annually.

Lipton is the second largest industrial employer in the county, behind Fisher-Price Toys of Medina.

The company is closing down its local plant to consolidate into more modern facilities in Fleming and Santa Cruz, Calif., company officials said.

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W. Lattin • County Historian



VOL. II

No. 39

A COLLAPSE

Leave it to the late William Monacelli to have candidly caught with camera this load of tomatoes which collapsed near a "Help Keep Albion Clean" sign. The farmer was no doubt enroute to the Hunt-Wesson Food Canning Factory in Albion during the early 1960's when his load shifted at the corner of Routes 98 and 31.

Looking back over several years, this photo perhaps expresses in a way the almost total collapse of the food processing industry, especially tomatoes, once so prominent in Orleans County. Remember the fragrant smell of Catsup in the air as 4,000 acres of locally-grown tomatoes were turned into that "elixir". It's now been over ten years since that bountiful aroma permeated the air.

The Hunt-Wesson plant in Albion, formerly Birds Eye Division of General Foods and still earlier T.S. Snider Corp., closed in the Spring of 1970. The plant actually dated back to the early nineteen hundreds when it was the Bert Olney Canning Company which also operated a facility on Olney Street in Medina. During eighteen months of World War II German prisoners of war were held in Albion at barracks in back of the canning factory. Prisoners were used for manual labor not only in Albion but other food processing plants such as Duffy-Mott in Holley which closed in 1971 and the H.V. Heinz Co. in Medina which closed in 1963. Along with those plant closings there was also the Morton Canning Co., the Wallace Dale Canning Factory in Barre Center, the Birds Eye Plant in Medina and others.

With tomato processors closing or leaving Orleans County, the raising of fifteen million tomato plants by Piazza, Albanese and other greenhouses in the area was halted. Ten million other plants were shipped in annually from the south. Likewise, migrant or seasonal labor has declined. When the Medina Heinz factory closed, 350 year round workers and 150 seasonal workers were left unemployed. With the Duffy-Mott Co. closing in Holley 150 employees lost jobs. In Albion, 400 to 450 seasonal workers and 50 permanent employees sought other employment with the closing of the Hunt-Wesson factory. Canning not only tomatoes but many other fruits and vegetables, these several factories were the mainstays for county farmers over several decades. Although Orleans County is still not devoid of food processors, we see this week a final chapter of local major food processing with the closing of the T.J. Lipton plant in Albion.

J-8
9-25-1980