

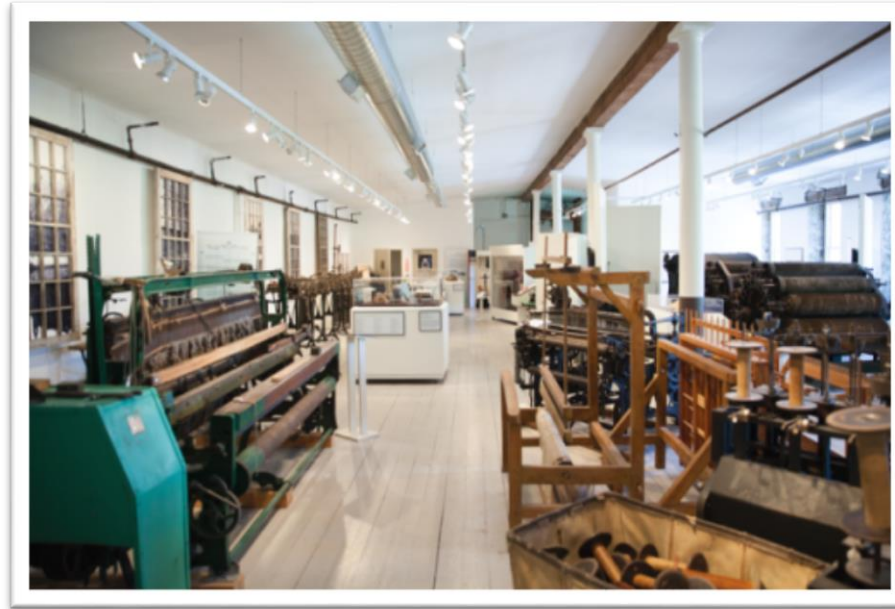
Community Engagement

The Workers Memory Project

Presented by Michael Rikley-Lancaster
Mississippi Valley Textile Museum


Mississippi Valley Textile Museum

- ▶ Housed in the former annex of the Rosamond Woolen Company in Almonte Ontario
- ▶ Constructed in 1867
- ▶ National Historic Site of Canada
- ▶ Industrial textile production and contemporary textile exhibits



Concept

- ▶ To engage with the community through direct contact with living history - the mill workers.
- ▶ Concept was in its planning stages in 2007
 - ▶ Realization that the workers have pride and comradery for each other and their work
 - ▶ Emphasis on workers experience rather than mill owners
 - ▶ Emphasis on direct contact and social histories
- ▶ Project would be to create a registry of mill workers, conduct oral history videos and put a call out for objects.
- ▶ Name it the Mill Workers Memory Project

A photograph of Marie Dunn, an elderly woman with short, wavy grey hair, wearing a dark blue jacket over a red top with small white polka dots and a necklace. She is seated in a wooden chair in front of a large wooden bookshelf filled with books.

Marie Dunn

A photograph of Don Jamieson, a middle-aged man with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved button-down shirt with a small pattern. He is smiling and seated in a wooden chair in front of a large wooden bookshelf filled with books.

Don Jamieson

Execution

▶ 2008 - Connecting with past mill workers

- ▶ Began by contacting mill workers living in Mississippi Mills using snail mail
- ▶ Word spread to past mill workers living in other provinces
- ▶ Informal Mill Workers Reunion
 - ▶ Registration and collecting of contact information
 - ▶ Live fiddle music and warm social atmosphere, emphasis on making workers feel welcome and important
 - ▶ Past mill workers reconnected and **shared stories with each other and staff of the MVTM**
 - ▶ Honorary lifetime members of museum

A photograph of Carl Dugdale, a middle-aged man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a black polo shirt, sitting in a wooden chair in a room with bookshelves.

Carl Dugdale

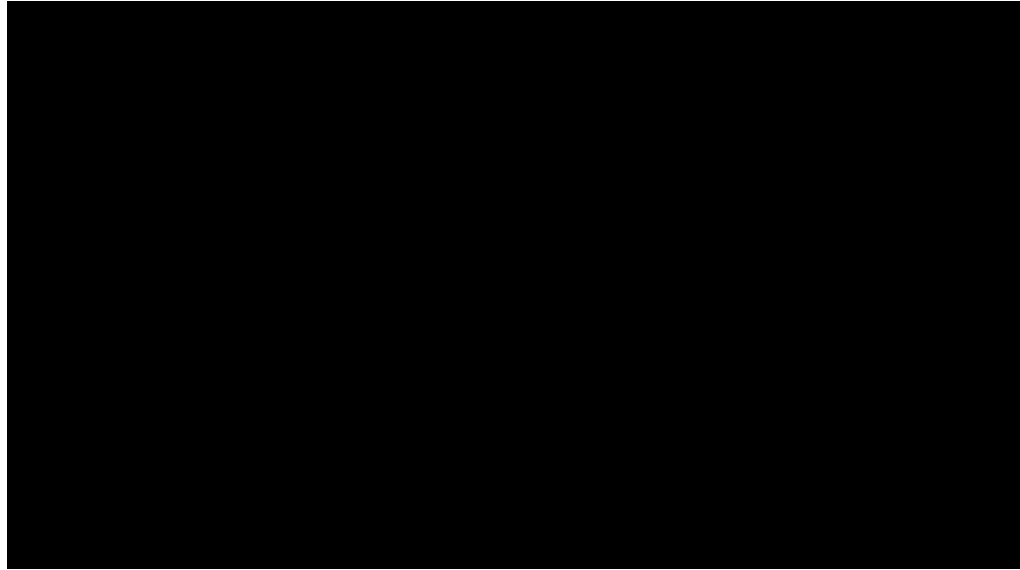
A photograph of Jean Collie, an elderly woman with short white hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored jacket over a pink shirt, sitting in a wooden chair with a white bag on her lap.

Jean Collie

Execution

- ▶ Conducting oral histories using video recordings
 - ▶ Sixty interviews completed over a three year period
 - ▶ Research was done prior to interviewing to encourage volunteers and museum staff to ask unique questions related to the mill worker
 - ▶ Attention to comfort to encourage mill workers to feel comfortable with video interviews
 - ▶ Refreshments and food were available on a table by the interviewee
 - ▶ Casual conversation prior to filming interview
 - ▶ Each interviewee signed a permission form to allow the museum to film them
 - ▶ Interviews were conducted by long-term Almonte residents who would have known the interviewee and were the same age bracket
 - ▶ Interviews were conducted in a way that felt like a discussion
 - ▶ Ready to conduct further interviews as mill workers are continually discovered
- ▶ Video documentary
- ▶ Transcribing
 - ▶ Museum volunteers transcribing interview recordings

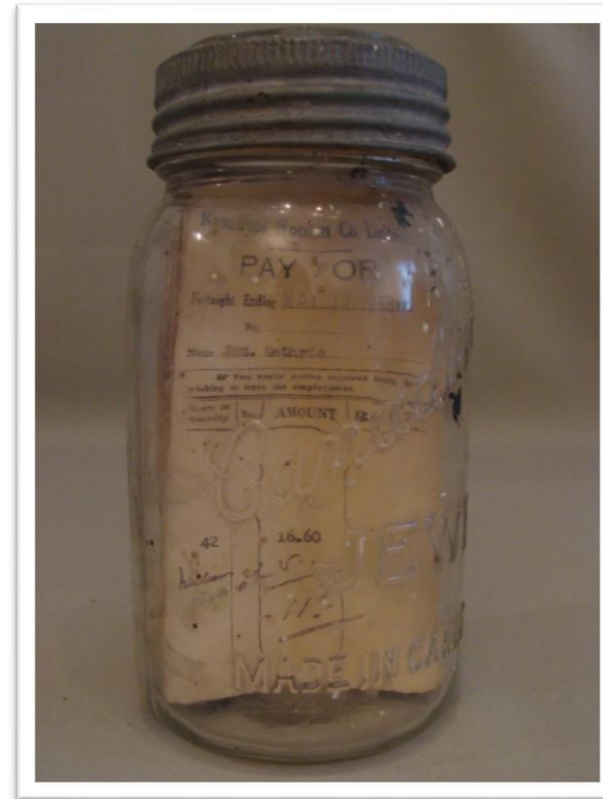
Don Morton on the daily tasks of a mill worker at the textile mill:



“It started at 8:00 am. We worked till noon time with an hour off for lunch. Then we worked till 5:00 pm. Work day included weighing out small amounts of dyes, dissolving them and then preparing formulas to do dye matches. What would happen is the customer would send in a colour that they wanted and we would match that colour. Quite often it meant sending the sample out to them for their approval and then it would come back and then we’d formulate it up to do production batches of that.”

Execution

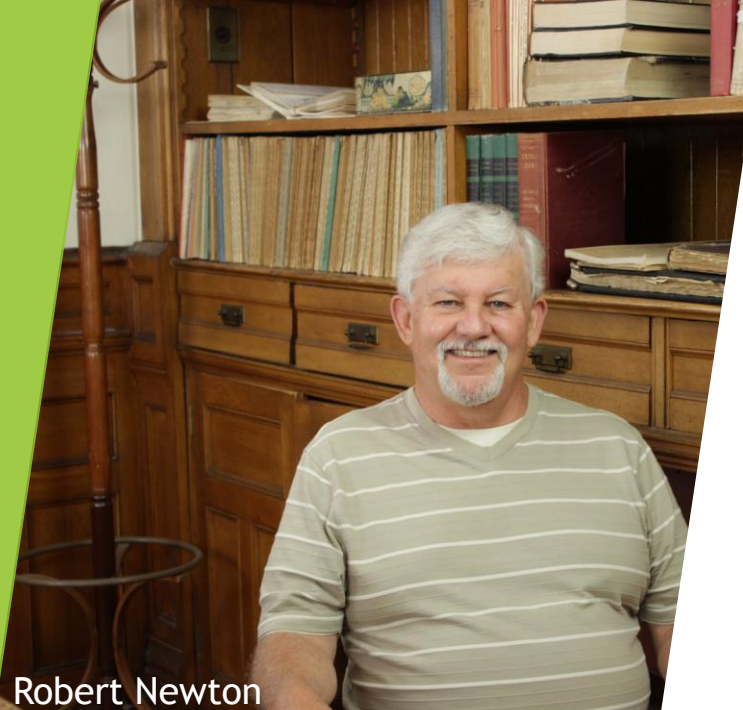
- ▶ Collecting artifacts donated by past mill workers
 - ▶ Interviewees were encouraged to bring in objects they have collection from the mill
 - ▶ Objects included a photograph of the original Presidents Office, a tin container containing original deeds for the property, documents of former shareholders of the company and pay stubs stored in a canning jar.
 - ▶ Mill workers continue to add to our collection




Pay stubs donated by Murray Guthrie in relation to mill worker Jason Guthrie

Outcome

- ▶ Community engagement through those who have had direct contact with the textile mill and its history
- ▶ Engagement with mill workers family members and friends visiting museum
- ▶ Honorary lifetime members who engage with the museum, visit regularly, donate objects and dollars.
- ▶ Engaging a new audience
- ▶ Collected oral histories, preservation of their stories
- ▶ Collection of photographs of mill workers
- ▶ Growth of our artifact collection
- ▶ Maintaining our focus on local history and museum mandate
- ▶ Mill workers network - continually discovering new workers and adding value to our story

A photograph of Robert Newton, a man with white hair and a goatee, wearing a light-colored striped shirt, standing in front of a wooden bookshelf filled with books.

Robert Newton

A photograph of Mary Hugessen, an elderly woman with short white hair, wearing a red cardigan over a white top and a necklace, sitting in front of a wooden bookshelf.

Mary Hugessen

Thank you for taking the time to listen
to our presentation!



Irene Robertson Thompson